

M A R A P R E M

**STRANGE BUT TRUE**

an honest and humorous autobiography  
of the youngest Indian archbishop

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# Strange But True

MAR APREM



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## Foreword

"God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform," says the first line of a famous old hymn written by William Cowper and included in the *Scottish Psalter*. The significance of these words has seldom been more true than the way in which God has worked in the life of Mar Aprem, Metroplitan of the Church of the East for all of India.

Certainly, I never expected to see Mar Aprem in the flesh. I was a news commentator for the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company at their 50,000 watt Boston station WBZ, and was also doing a nightly television news broadcast over WBZTV while my daughter Twyla was earning her Master of Divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary in the state of new Jersey.

When she came home to Lexington, Massachusetts on the weekends or holidays, she would share with her mother and me some of her experiences while at school. One of her most interesting accounts was concerning a student from India who would bicycle around Princeton with his flowing clerical robes flying in the air, and the breeze cutting through his heavy dark beard as he pedaled his way to a baby-sitting job. She was so impressed with his bicycle riding ability and his love for that mode of transportation that one summer when she came home to spend her vacation, she left her girl's bicycle for Mar Aprem to ride because he was too far away from India to go home for the summer.

Later, after Mar Aprem had returned to India, she told us that this jovial, personable priest was riding around

South India in a fast - moving Ambassador automobile with a flag or two flying from the front fenders as an indication of his rank and station. She told us that he was a very important man in India. And to cap it all off, as if she were reciting something from the *Arabian Nights*, she said he lived in a *palace* ! I had read in fairy stories about people who lived in palaces, but I had never known a bicycle riding priest who had become a bishop and lived in a palace. So, I was thoroughly impressed.

God was working mysteriously in my own life, too ; so, as strange as it may seem, when I retired from my work with Westinghouse, the possibility presented itself for me to do some missionary work. This was not the first time I had changed careers. I started my professional life as a high school teacher of Spanish and history, and soon became Professor of Modern Languages at Southeastern State College in Durant, Oklahoma. Later I taught Romance Languages at Boston University, became an announcer in Spanish and French at the 50,000 watt international short -wave station WBOS, and for a time was supervisor of programs in Spanish to South America over the facilities of the National Broadcasting Company, and the Columbia Broadcasting System, in New York City, for the United States State Department. Still later, I returned to broadcasting in English as a radio and television news commentator and correspondent. So, rather than being apprehensive about changing jobs, I looked forward eagerly to some full time missionary work.

One trip took me to Europe, and an opportunity for me and my wife Merle to attend the International Conference on World Evangelization at Lausanne, Switzerland. We also went to Asia, visiting Hawaii, Japan, Korea, Thailand,

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Sri Lanka, Nationalist China, Hong Kong, and finally *India!*

India is a vast and fabulous country. Anyone who has ever awakened early in the morning to look out over his balcony from one of the upper floors of the Taj Mahal Hotel into the harbor at Bombay, with its scores of ships from all over the world, and the city coming alive from the arched "Gateway of India" to the graciously curving Marine Drive, would never be able to forget the scene, nor the experience.

And anyone who ever flew into Tiruchirappalli on a DC3 from Sri Lanka would never forget that experience either; or such overland rides as our car trip from Tiruchirappalli to Madurai, and an all day train ride from Madurai to Trivandrum with the richly variegated Indian countryside and mountain ranges moving past our window in a never ending kaleidoscope of patterns and colors. It is experiences such as these that cause India, finally, to run through your life as if it were blood flowing through your veins, and you find that India is an inextricable part of you.

Who would ever have believed that my wife and I would be the guests of Mar Aprem in his Palace in Trichur? Well, we were, and we took many rides in that Ambassador automobile with Mar Aprem's official flags flying in the breeze as we went about planning a big city-wide evangelistic crusade for Trichur in the state of Kerala.

Mar Aprem is a great manager and a splendid organizer. As chairman of the committee to arrange for

meetings, he won the support of every church and religious organization in Trichur, and involved many of the most influential professional and business people in the undertaking.

It seemed that the whole project would be doomed to failure when we learned that the speaker would be unable to come to India, but God always makes a way out, and my oldest son, the Rev. Dr. Streeter Stuart, Jr. who was then pastor of the Church of God in Ann Arbor, Michigan told his congregation about the situation. They saw it as a great missionary opportunity in which they could participate; so they graciously consented to give him time off from his pastoral duties to be the speaker.

The campaign was a tremendous success. Thousands came to the vast playground of the Chaldean Syrian High School in Trichur which had been converted into a great outdoor auditorium with a beautiful raised platform at one end. The English messages were beautifully interpreted in Malayalam by the Rev. P. V. Jacob, Chairman of the Church of God in South India. Rev. K. C. Seth of the Church of South India had organized a fine choir, and there was a small orchestra with an organ. The haunting melodies of those beautiful hymns being sung in Malayalam touched my innermost being and echo through my soul to this day. The people responded to the Gospel messages in a remarkable way. A total of four thousand souls came into the prayer rooms. As the meeting progressed, attendance grew, and I had an opportunity to get much better acquainted with Mar Aprem.

He is a giant—not in physical stature—but in many other ways. He is also one of the most humble persons I ever

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met. He sets a commendable example of modest living by accepting what is probably the least remunerative salary of any person of his rank and importance anywhere in the world. He dresses very plainly, and his food is devoid of all luxury or extravagance. In fact, on our first trip to India we found Mar Aprem living very simply in his "palace" with the cooking being done over a wood fire on an elevated platform. And, although the weather can be oppressively hot in the summer months, there was no refrigerator anywhere on the premises. When we returned to the United States, we told a very kind woman of the situation, and she generously gave us a sum of money which we were able to augment, and when we went back to India, we purchased a refrigerator so that this hard working servant of the Lord could have a cool drink now and then to make his sacrificial life a little less austere.

It was a happy day for me when I saw the refrigerator being delivered. It was loaded into a big wheelbarrow which was wheeled by one man! A second man balanced it. I was very thankful that during our stay that trip we had access to refreshing, cold drinks.

As soon as we returned to the United States, Mar Aprem had the refrigerator transferred to his orphanage in the suburbs of Trichur, so that perishable food and milk for the orphans could be kept cold. His rather primitive, nearby hospital was also able, through this arrangement, to keep certain vaccines and perishable medicines in the same refrigerator.

In spite of his life of self-denial, this frugal person has an exceptionally rich educational background. He has probably visited more places around the world than most



international airline pilots. He has studied at some of the finest schools in Asia, Europe, and the United States. He is full of energy and enthusiasm. He has great ability. During the Trichur campaign when we failed to receive the translation into Malayalam of a book which we wanted to distribute during the meetings, he stayed up all night one night and translated the entire book into Malayalam. When dawn broke, the book was ready for the presses, and we had it printed in time to be distributed as originally planned.

Mar Aprem has a deep and abiding love for God and the Church, and he wants others to share this love. As a result, he has done much research into the lives of those men who were leaders of the Church of the East in India. And he has recorded this rich history in several biographies of these leaders. His enthusiasm for writing has resulted in the publication of numerous books—biographies, liturgies, and history, especially history. It is no wonder that he was elected president of the Church History Association of India. He has also made valuable contributions toward keeping alive the ancient Syriac language, and has almost completed a basic textbook as a guide for those who would like to learn Aramaic on their own.

This dynamic and self-effacing man of God has a deep compassion, a firm grasp of mankind's great needs, and yet has a keen sense of humor.

In our home in Lexington, Massachusetts, we have hanging in the hallway, in a very conspicuous place, a large photograph of Mar Aprem, which I took myself while we were in Trichur. It shows a man with an abundance of dark attractive hair, a thick black beard; twinkling, amused

eyes, and a warm human smile. He is the kind of man you would like to have as your brother, or your son, or your son-in-law, or, as in my case, a devoted, kind, and wonderful friend.

I know you will enjoy following the intriguing development of the life of Mar Aprem as it is revealed in this autobiography, from his early childhood to the mature, splendidly educated, broadly travelled, and unusually capable leader which he is today—the Metropolitan of the Church of the East in India.

**Streeter Stuart**

Lexington, Massachusetts, USA

March 5, 1981

## Preface

It is too early for me to write an autobiography. My ideas and outlook will be mature only if I wait a few years more. It is unwise to write and publish something now and later on to act contrary to what I have written. I was advised, therefore, to desist from venturing into an autobiography at such a young age.

But I am finding it extremely difficult to recall something that happened in my life twenty years ago. As years go by, it will be more difficult to do it. Therefore I decided to write this autobiography now. It can be considered as the first part. After some years, if it is possible, I shall write the second part.

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote his famous "An Autobiography" while he was only a middle aged man. Since he wrote his autobiography his life and the circumstances in which he lived became different. He wrote while India was under the British. After India became independent and Nehru became its Prime Minister he could not write the later part of his life's story. One reason for this was that he died in office. If he had lived longer - he could have written longer - he could have perhaps written about the later and significant years of his life.

What Harry S. Truman, former President of the United States of America, has written in the Preface of his *Memoirs* is true of any of us.

“Unfortunately some of our Presidents were prevented from telling all the facts of their administrations because they died in office. Some were physically spent on leaving the White House and could not have undertaken to write even if they had wanted to. Some were embittered by the experience and did not care about living it again in telling about.”

Not only the Presidents of the U.S.A, but also bishops in Christian Churches also are “embittered by the experience and did not care about living it again in telling about it.”

Like Harry S. Truman I have refrained from “hindsight and after-thoughts”. What I have recorded in the following pages are facts and not fiction.

Since I do not keep a diary, I am not able to fill the following pages with figures. Nor do I think that the readers are much interested in figures. Nevertheless, the events recorded in this book will be sufficient to reveal the person and his character.

Two of my predecessors in Trichur, the later Mar Abimalek Timotheus and the later Mar Thoma Darmo, did not write any autobiographies. After their demise many of their admirers demanded their biographies. Finally it became my duty and privilege to write the account of their lives. Those are my first two publications. The difficulty I experienced in getting details of their lives has made me write an autobiography. I am the one who knows me most.

This autobiography does not rule out the need of a biography that somebody may like to write in order to

present to posterity an objective analysis of the affairs for which I had to give leadership. I do not claim to have a hundred per cent objectivity in this book; it is impossible to make an autobiography completely objective. Still I have tried to make this book balanced in its observations of men and matters.

I am not an accomplished writer. Still I have a passion to write. The encouragement I received when I wrote my previous books made me to spend my time on this book.

My two previous journeys are recorded in this book with a few more details than the third trip. The reason is that the details of my third trip are recorded in my recent book *America Revisited*. Hence only glimpses of that visit are seen in this work.

A bishop's life is not rightly known to the people outside. They are in some way isolated from the life of the ordinary people. Some people think that bishops live in luxury. Only those who observe them a little closer realise it is otherwise.

Some have asked me to write a book on my strange but true experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant. It can strengthen others when they are put in similar trials and tribulations. It is not an ordinary autobiography that I should write. But at least a glimpse of a real life which has two important sides must be there—one of glory and triumph and the other of difficulties and challenges. If I borrow a familiar post-Emergency phrase, there should be "the two faces" of a bishop.

I have often wondered whether anybody actually records the intensity of his trials in his service to mankind.

Discretion forbids me to tell my story as it is. Still the following facts in this work will give a glimpse of a very strange life. The words are not examples of oriental exaggeration. Occasionally I have heard the remark from the listeners "Oh. no" when I simply state some aspects of my life. "It is incredible", they say. And rightly so,

The general approach of this book is less than very serious. It is the lighter sides of my life that are highlighted in this memoirs. Some experiences may sound strange. But it is true. That justifies the title of this book.

I am grateful to all those who read the typescript and proof sheets and helped in many ways to bring out this book.

My gratitude goes to Mr. Streeter Stuart of Boston who wrote a generous Foreword to this book. He has been my guest in India, as I have been his guest in America.

Trichur  
1-1-1981

MAR APREM

# I

## EARLY YEARS

The former Chief Minister of Kerala State Mr. C. Achutha menon wrote a series of articles about his early years in a Malayalam weekly. I was really surprised at his ability to recall his school days. How vividly does he describe the events that happened about half a century ago. It is impossible for me to do a similar job. Nor do I have any impressive illustrations or academic achievements of my school days to narrate to others.

I was born on June 13, 1940. As per the custom the first two children of our parents were born in the mother's home. I am the fourth child and was born in my father's home. My father was the eldest of his parents, So was my mother. Therefore there were not many elder cousins for me. But my father's brother and two sisters had been married by the time I was born. The house began to be crowded. Thus my parents with four children left the ancestral home in the East Fort area in Trichur and began to live in a rented building next to the Traveller's Bungalow, about a mile far from our father's home.

In the rented building my younger brother was born. At the time we were constructing our present house named Abbi Villa, named after the youngest child of our family, Abimalek. He was given that name because he was baptised by the then Metropolitan, Mar Abimalek Timotheus of revered memory. He himself did the blessing of our new house.

When we moved to our present house in 1942, the area was like a deserted place. The Protestant (known at that time as C.M.S) cemetery was nearby. People were afraid to stay in the neighbourhood of a burial ground. But the land was cheap there. More than an acre costed us only five thousand rupees while that much costs today a million rupees, i.e 200 times rise in the cost in 38 years. The cemetery is still there. But people are not afraid of ghosts as they used to, despite the fact that more bodies have been buried there during the last 38 years.

Within two months after I had completed three years, the sixth child was born in the new home. With two children after me I was no more the baby at home. My parents decided to send me to the kindergarten school. Such training was rare in those days.

Not far from my house was a nursery school. It was my privilege to spend two years of kindergarten education under the guidance of a dedicated teacher. Miss. Anne Paul who taught me when I was only four was so proud and happy to attend my sermon in Bangalore after I became a bishop. I remember the good sisters of the Bethel Ashram who devoted much time to manual labour as well



to prayer. Even now as I go to that compound nearly years later I have pleasant memories of the pre-school education I had at that place.

Church Missionary Society Boys School next door was the venue of my primary education. Since I had two years at the nursery school I did not have much reluctance to go in the class room. I remember some children who tried to run away from school with their elder brother or sister in class two.

On 15 August 1947 we were given bananas to celebrate the independence of India from British bondage. I was sorry for one thing. The name of the British emperor reigning at that the time was that of mine, King George VI, rather of the present Queen Elizbaeth. My disappointment was not due to any special loyalty to the British crown. But I was told that we would not get any sweets for King George's birthday which all schools were so far celebrating. The emperor's birthday it was. But more than it was the birthday of another George, myself. Now I could not boast of my birthday that it was the birthday of the emperor. No more sweets.

The Chaldean Syrian High School had me on their rolls for six years. The years 1949 to 55 were formative years of my life. This school situated in the premises of the Church brought me closer to the Church. Since there was no time to go home to take lunch I used to eat lunch in the room of the Rev. P.T. John whom my parents adored very much. I too respected him greatly even after he had filed a suit against me contradicting the claims of my consecration as a Metropolitan.

The room of the Rev. P.T. John was frequented by many devoted men who talked about Church politics. While eating lunch I used to listen to their talk of preparations to get a bishop. They spoke with great devotion to the Rev. P. T. John whom they considered as their leader, *par excellence*. At that time there was no head for the Church in India. Some of these devotees spoke many bad words against other priests and laymen who belonged to the opposite party. I was not old enough to digest some of these abusive language. Nevertheless the need for dedicated clergymen for this Church was instilled in my young mind.

In June 1952 Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan arrived in Trichur. I wanted to see his face even before he reached the Church. In order to achieve this ambition I joined the Boys Scouts in the Chaldean Syrian School. The Scouts were stationed at the "Round" where the procession was to commence. Thus as volunteers, the scouts marched along with the procession. Even inside the Church compound we were allowed to stand inside the specially erected "pandal" during the public reception meeting.

My longing to see a new bishop of our own was shared by most of the people of our community. For more than seven years there was no bishop for our Church in Trichur. We were anxiously waiting for a spiritual leader. Mar Abimalek Thimotheus, who was the Metropolitan in Trichur even before my parents were born, passed away on April 30, 1945. Then I was only 5 years old. Still I have vivid memories of a particular event on May 1, 1945. As the devotees with lugubrious faces went to see the grave that was being dug to place

the dead body of Mar Timotheus the following day, I joined the crowd. As I bent over one side of the grave, the mud under my feet gave way. I almost fell into it. I was miraculously saved, as a helping hand pushed me to the other side. As I look back I ask "was I preserved to this day to be his successor?" God's ways are mysterious.

My family members are great devotees of the late Mar Thimotheus Metropolitan. The Metropolitan had given the blessing of our newly built home which was named after him "Abbi Villa". Although Abimalek the Metropolitan's first name, was a biblical name, it was not in use in Kerala where names such as Thomas, Joseph and Varghese (George) were very common. When Mar Thimotheus Metropolitan baptised my young brother in 1942, the name Abimalek was given to him. Many other children are now called by that name. My parents used to go for blessings of the Metropolitan. This love for the Church and the Metropolitan was imbibed in me. Our family went as a group to attend the Sunday service. The father would walk in front followed by some of us. Then the mother would walk a few paces behind along with the sisters. I hasten to add that the husband in the front and the wife behind was the custom of my childhood days. Now the fashion has changed. The couples walk together and some people remark "English picture" meaning that they saw it only in the Hollywood movies.

Not only the Church but also the Sunday school was compulsory. Even if we had to go to a relative's home for a wedding on a Sunday it was on the condition that we would not miss our Sunday school classes

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in the afternoon. As we return home after Sunday school, before we enter into the building father used to ask whether we lost our first places in the classes. In the Sunday evenings mother would read Bible stories to us. The great interest shown by parents and elder brothers and sister made me stand first in the class. Of the nine years in Sunday school I lost the prize only in one class. I felt sorry for it indeed.

Morning and evening prayers were compulsory in our home. My mother would start the morning prayer. Although it was a little difficult to get up in the morning, I used to be regular. That habit helped throughout my life. Bible reading was also a good habit I was able to cultivate in my early life. I read Bible from cover to cover during one summer vacation when I was only thirteen years old.

## AS SEMINARY STUDENT

Mar Thoma Darmo was an attractive personality. Under his able leadership the Church began to flourish. In January 1954 he ordained nine deacons and five priests. I climbed up a window to have a look at the ordination service that was being conducted. I was not aware at that time that one day I would be ordained like that. Also, I would not have believed if somebody had prophesied to me that one day I would have to conduct similar ordination service.

Within a few months after this ordination service at St. John the Baptist Church, I began to attend the evening prayers in that Church every day. As soon as the school was over at four in the afternoon, I rushed to the Church for evening prayer. The sexton of that Church was sick. I used to open and close the doors and windows before and after every evening prayer. It was a joy for me to be of some service to the Church.

Not only the aspirants to the ministry, but also other students started attending Syriac class in St. Mar

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Aprém Church in 1954. The Rev. P.T. John, our family friend, was the teacher. I took keen interest in the study of that sacred language. Our teacher began to impress upon our young minds how God spoke to Adam in this language in the garden of Eden. In addition to the prophets and the Pharisees, Jesus also spoke this language. After his introduction how delighted we were at the privilege of learning this rare sacred script.

It was a custom for the Metropolitan to visit some Churches after his evening prayer at the Big Church. In August 1954 he once visited St. John the Baptist Church which I used to attend for the evening prayers. The Metropolitan asked the vicar, the Rev. M.L. Francis who this young boy was. He explained that I was the grandson of the parish trustee Mookan Kochouseph. The Metropolitan had met my grandfather.

Language is not always a serious barrier for communication. At least that evening the Metropolitan and myself conversed. As a high school student I could not speak English well. As a foreigner the Metropolitan was only beginning to learn our mother tongue Malayalam, which he did not master even after spending another fourteen years in this area. He asked me to attend the evening prayers and Seminary classes in the Big Church every day.

Excited I was when I went home. The parents were not very keen on this suggestion. "You are only fourteen. How can you make such a decision" was their reaction. I knew that I was called to be a clergyman. I did not want to be a priest. I was satisfied with the rank of a deacon. To become a bishop was unthinkable in 1954. The higher ranks were reserved

people from the Middle East. They were beautiful to look at. They had good taste to chant Syriac songs. They were also considered to be scholars.

Neither in my father's family nor in my mother's family anybody went to priesthood. Within my family nobody expected me to become a clergyman. My father had secretly hoped that one of her ten children would become a priest. Giving tithe, one tenth to God, is a Christian practice inherited from Jewish law. Even if one of us was to be a priest it was not me, my family members thought. I do not think that my behaviour was anything antipriest, but they thought that my younger brother who was baptized by the late Metropolitan Mar Abimalek Timotheus was cut for the profession. He was given the name Abimalek hoping that one day he would become a priest. But God decided otherwise.

Engineering and law were the two professions I thought I liked. Being interested in Mathematics I thought I would succeed as an engineer. At the same time symptoms for oratory were evinced by me in the school impromptu speeches. But the challenge of priesthood did not require any qualifications or fields of interest. How did you come into priesthood as nobody dedicated you for this" is a question often asked. Who knows God's calling.

Stubborn was I in my decision to attend Seminary classes the next day. Thus I began to attend Seminary classes from 5 to 8 p. m. Therefore I was able to return home after school only at 8.30 p. m. instead of 4 or

4.30 p. m. This meant that my high school studies were to suffer. The class teacher Mr. V.K. George suggested that I should stop Seminary classes for two months during the School Final examinations. I defied everybody.

I was mad after my new decision. On Wednesdays I used to go to Church for Communion service, which left no time for studying in the mornings before going to school. Nobody including my parents appreciated my neglect of studies. But I said that I had never failed so far. So I would not fail in School Final examinations. It was true. But I did not get the first class that I desired. I had first class marks (above 60%) in some of the papers. What I wanted was enough marks to go to College.

At the age of the 15 I went to College. I got admission to first group (Mathematics) along with the future engineers. During the two years of my intermediate course at St. Thomas College the same was the experience. I spent five hours in the college and five hours in the Seminary. This left not much time for home work. My Chemistry lecturer advised me to suspend one of the two studies. But I wanted to do both. My insistence on the both courses would have taught me a disastrous lesson. But fortunately during my college studies the Seminary classes were shifted from the wig Church, Trichur, to the newly built Seminary building six miles away. Thus I was able to concentrate on my college courses. My Seminary training was confined to the summer vacations.

During my Seminary training from 1954 to 1957 I did not get the maximum benefit of all classes



which some of the full time students were privileged to have. I could attend classes regularly only in the summer vacations. Therefore I never had summer vacations since 1954. It is true even today. After the school Final examination I rushed to the Big Church and attended the classes. Even on the day of re-opening of the College I first went to attend the Seminary class before I went to commence on my College course.

During these three years in Trichur when I was a part time Seminary student, I participated in various church activities. I taught in Sunday school. Some of the students who were about ten years old did not respect this fourteen year old teacher. As a result I had the misfortune of teaching some of them in the same class all those three years while some of the obedient ones were two classes ahead.

Mr. T. D. Paul, who was teaching Sunday school teachers' Bible Class, was sick one day. I was asked to be the substitute for him. Since I was not yet sixteen, I had hesitation to be a teacher of the teachers. On that day I preached on faith basing my speech on the text in Hebrews eleventh chapter. As a result I was invited to preach a Lenten sermon on Sunday evening in Mar Mari Sleeha Church. That was my first open air preaching. I am sure that my legs must have shivered as I faced the microphone for half an hour. Since that day I have been in demand for many meetings.

Along with my preaching career I was fascinated to be a writer too. My eldest brother Jose was

the publisher of the new Church magazine called the *Voice of the East*. He asked me to contribute an article to the Malayalam magazine. My enthusiasm to do anything and everything for the Church to which I was wedded made me to encroach into the field of writing. I had no special training. There was nobody to give me any guidance. I am not sure whether I had any natural flair for writing. Nevertheless I wrote down the sermon on faith which I had preached. Being on the text of Hebrews eleventh chapter first verse, I wrote "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen". I looked up the concordance of the Bible in Malayalam language. I was able to quote some related verses and the sermon was completely written. When it was published in the Malayalam edition of the *Voice of the East*, the members of the Church began to recognize the youngest writer of the Church magazine.

The encouragement I received from various quarters made me to translate the same sermon into English and to publish it in the foreign edition of the *Voice of the East*. During the last twenty six years since the publication of my first article on faith, the *Voice of the East* has published more than six hundred articles of mine counting both the Malayalam and English articles. Even during the University examinations I used to devote Sunday for writing a devotional article for our Church magazine. God opened up a new channel for me to serve my people. Although I never improved my style of writing I persisted in writing. Sometimes I feel that some of the articles I publish

w are not better than the articles on faith which I  
wrote 26 years ago. But one thing is certain I  
have more confidence to write something. And I  
am certain my hope to be a successful and accomplished  
minister.

I would have committed a great blunder. I am now  
glad that I did not do it that way. Since I was a Semin-  
ary student I decided not to go to College when I passed  
High School Final examination. Except one I was the  
youngest student in my class, not yet fifteen. I thought  
that the wisdom of this world was foolishness in the  
presence of the Lord. I wanted to serve the Church and  
study Bible. But wisdom dawned on me before the  
summer vacation was over. Therefore I went to St. Thomas  
College and got admitted. Although I despised secular  
education at the time, now I feel that in our society I  
could not have had effective ministry, if I had not  
studied in the College and pursued theological studies  
there.

In 1955 I was the only Seminary student who was  
attending College. Some had stopped going to School  
before completing high school education. Others had  
completed high school education. Others had completed  
high school but could not go to College due to fin-  
ancial reasons. I prayed God to give me enough  
simplicity so that I should not behave as a College  
student. I used to go to College in simple clothes on  
an old bicycle. I never wore shoes or sandals.  
When I was studying in the College. Bare foot I walked.  
I had no company in the college. I rushed to the

Church when the classes were over. Some observed that I did not have the seriousness or status of a College student.

In a way I may have missed something of the happy days of a College student. I do not regret it now. I did not learn any vices which some of the rich kids at the College had. I do not claim any virtue for my piety. I was one of the few college students who did not go to a coffee house (or toddy shop) or cinema house. When I refused a cigarette in the College farewell party, when everybody was expected to smoke, some of my colleagues and even the father principal who always had a large cigar between his lips, must have considered me a peculiar student. Thus in many ways I did not "enjoy" my College years in the usual sense of the term. However, I am grateful for my college years, the knowledge I acquired in the classrooms in a very significant period of my youth, fifteen to seventeen.

At 17 I was asked to go to Jabalpur for theological training. My parents were reluctant to let me go to such a distant place. Moreover, I must be eighteen before I finally decide to become a priest. Legally speaking the parents are responsible until the complete eighteen years of age. My father said that I should pass my M. A. before going for B. A. (Bachelor of Divinity) course. The Metropolitan wanted me to go. Among the Seminary students I was the only one with college qualification to avail the scholarship offered at the Leonard Theological

ge, Jabalpur. I prayed and prayed. I sat quietly on the rock on the Seminary hill. Tears rolled down my cheeks. "Lord, tell my parents to allow me to go to study for B. D. now. I may not get another chance next year when I become 18. Does one year make so much difference in my ability to make a decision?"

From Seminary I cycled down six miles to my father for a final decision. I did not have the courage to demand an answer from him. I expected to hear either "yes" or "no" from him. He said neither. After questioning me for some time he said "I leave the decision to you. But don't regret about it later. You should not blame your parents for not giving you proper guidance. There will be difficulties in ministry. Priests are poorly paid. If you want a life of poverty you can survive. Otherwise you will be disappointed." After these many years I do not remember the exact words. But the meaning was the same. I approve. One thing I can say that I never regretted my decision. And now I am sure that my parents are proud of the decision of that immature seventeen old boy.

## FOUR YEARS AT JABALPUR

It was in 1957 His Grace Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan decided to send me (then a College going seminary student) to Leonard Theological College Jabalpur. I was the farsight and foresight of His Grace Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan to get clergy trained for the service of our mother Church. The great vision of the Metropolitan was fulfilled to a great extent.

It was to an unknown place I was to go to study for an unfamiliar course of Graduate in Theology and Bachelor of Divinity, to study a strange language like Greek! The spoken tongue of the area was different from my mother tongue. Everything looked new. I searched for the place in the railway map and discovered: 1410 miles far from home.

I look back to the encouraging words of Mar Thoma Darmo which were the farewell blessings to me. It caused concern to my well wishers and relatives that a seventeen year old boy should go to such a distant place. I can think how gloomy I looked to

ends who came to see me off at the railway station, was looking to the future. It was full of bright prospects too.

Even now I can imagine how much worried my relatives and friends were when they waited to hear about my safe arrival in Jabalpur. I heard later about the anxieties of the Metropolitan on this matter. It was all due to the fact that my EXPRESS TELEGRAM informing my safe arrival in Jabalpur reached Trichur only six months later. There was a 'no-slow' strike. The telegraph office had warned me that it would be slow to reach. But I never imagined that the strike was that slow; I was trying to adjust to the new situation thinking that my telegram had reached home. But on the fifth day I received the telegram from home enquiring about my arrival.

It was a time of discouragement for me to leave 'Big Church' Trichur where I was attending prayer every evening. I had to leave my college early to attend to the prayers on some special occasions. It may sound very foolish to some of my educated brethren if I tell that I have been forced to leave even the examination hall early just to make it possible to attend the prayer.

There are many things for which I have to be grateful to God, during my stay in Leonard Theological College which has the co-operation of many Churches. Since my training a new denomination was represented in its Alumni list. Leonard Theological College was happy in getting this opportunity of participating in training

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one of the seminary students for the Holy Apostolic Church of the East, which is an ancient Church.

The training which I have received did not confine me to one particular system. One of the privileges of a union institution is the opportunity to hold the faith of one's own mother Church. It is true that I could not participate fully, because I used to stay back at the time of Holy Communion as is required by all the Orthodox Churches. Still on other occasions of ordinary worship (when there is no Holy communion) I had opportunities to participate, to lead and even to preach on certain occasions. I had opportunities to preach in various places, of different denominations.

There were many inspiring moments in my life when I had occasion to witness Jesus Christ and to talk about our Holy Apostolic Church. I got opportunities to travel from south to the extreme North of India speaking in big cities including New Delhi and Bombay. My study in Leonard provided opportunity to travel about 15,000 (fifteen thousand) miles in India by train.

My four year training greatly enriched my previous seminary training. I did not feel that I got all what I had needed. I looked to the future to get more training and knowledge to help me to serve our Mother Church. I thanked His Grace Mar Thoma Darmo Meteropolitan for doing this service to me as well as to our Mother Church. The future was full of prospects and challenges.

" You should be kept in a museum. Because I had thought that the Nestorian Christians had disappeared



from the face of the earth" remarked Dr. Roth, a new German professor who came to teach in Leonard Theological College. It was news to him to know that this ancient Church was still alive. As I was the first member of my Church to join that seminary, most of the students and staff at that institution knew for the first time that this Church had survived the vicissitudes of history.

It was at Leonard my talent as a debator was fully discovered. I represented my class and defeated the senior students in debates. Not only the class prizes but also inter-Collegiate debate trophies and shields began to decorate my room. One day when I returned with two trophies, one from the Law College and the other from the Agricultural College, there was a great surprise in the college campus. The next morning the principal of our college Dr. George S. Sahai proudly praised me when the College community gathered for the morning worship. It was the first time when the Chief Minister Memorial Debate Trophy entered the gates of that institution. It was a memorable day in my life to win the first prize for the individual as well as trophy for the institution on the same evening after winning another trophy defeating the students of Law.

The debate in the Law College was on Prohibition and at the Agricultural College it was on the National Cadet Corps as a means for the discipline in the educational institutions. I cannot recall after twenty years whether I spoke for or against the proposition. But one thing I remember about the Law College that I had to switch sides. Because my colleague Emmanuel James

(later a Seminary principal) wanted to speak on the side which I had desired to speak. When he insisted that he wanted that side I had no alternative but to speak on the opposite side. How easy it is to cross the floor! How easy it is to speak without conviction! In debates as well as in life we often play roles best suited for the occasion.

I prepared my speech in advance for debates. Usually only seven minutes are given to each contestant. Sometimes I prepared for eight minutes. In order to recite everything I memorised I increased my speed and concluded. When I participated in the debate held under the auspices of the Rotary Club in Jabalpur, the judges remarked that they had to deny me the prize because of the speed of the speech. I should have learned the lesson on that day. But like some people who never learn from the past failures, I am still guilty of over speed in speaking and writing. It is good that I never drive. If I ever do it I am going to be booked for speeding. Now I am trying to slow down while preaching.

“ Mr. Mookerjee is not only a debator and a book worm but also a good sportsman ” were the kind and pregnant words uttered by the Principal on the College sports day. He announced when I completed third in a half a mile race. You will wonder what is there to make a special mention of a person getting the third place when so many were getting first and second places. What he praised was my courage to complete the half a mile when the two good sportsman completed quite ahead of me. The spectators thought that I would give up when the first and second places were announced

the microphone. But I did not give up. I completed the whole length and claimed that I obtained full rank. Do you want to know how many contested? Three. I was the last, much behind the other two! But the Principal praised was my sportsman spirit to walk out of the contest seeing two giant sportsmen ready for the competition. When other contestants desisted from making this futile attempt, I stood there like David facing Goliath. I was too small in age and size. I was about 20 years old weighing one hundred five pounds. I was glad that some people appreciated my courage and sportsman spirit while others laughed at my audacity.

There was a lot of fun about sports and such extracurricular activities. There was one student who never came out to play games. He was a brilliant student who did not have any interests other than his studies. He was made the President of the Athletic Association!

One more skeleton body in my class was V.T. Koshy, a student of Bishop Eshaw Mar Timotheus of the Mar Thoma Church. He was made the General Secretary of the Athletic Association. I was made the Captain of the Mini Koit game. There was one short student called "Chota" (small) Varghese. His name was proposed as the captain of the football games. It was all a joke being played by some staunch and stouty senior students who fared well only in the play grounds and scored poorly on the academic side.

During my studies in Jabalpur I was able to meet many friends. New vistas of understanding were open to me. I

was able to read many books and magazines. It was also my first contact with Americans. My participation and cooperation in several activities were appreciated by them. This encouragement made me to do things in which I was not very competent.

Jabalpur Seminary is famous for its English and Hindustani choirs. The Christmas concerts used to attract many non-Christians to the College. I knew nothing about western music. I saw people singing in different parts using musical notations. My eagerness to co-operate with various activities of the Seminary community made me a regular member of the choir. Mrs. Presler, the choir Director, welcomed me and asked me to stand in 'alto' section. Since I was only seventeen they thought my voice would blend with the female voices in *alto*. Needless to add that I was singing in a very low voice so that my noise would not disturb the sweet sounding voice of our choir.

Being aware of my own limitations I decided to withdraw from the English choir in my fourth year. I thought it advisable to get out of that mess before my weakness was detected by the choir Director. But when I tried to be absent from the regular choir practices on Sunday afternoons, Mrs. Presler said: "Mooken, we need you in our English choir". Even now it is an unsolved mystery to me whether she tolerated me in the English choir either hoping that one day I would pick up a taste for singing or just to remind her often how awful one could sing! Can a leopard change his spots or an Ethiopian his colour? I still wonder at my patience to continue in the choir even when my well wishers

sistently told me that my singing was boring. Many of us are stubborn even when good criticisms come from friends.

In Hindustani choir too I sang. As I look back to the pages of the old college magazines, I see the photographs of English and Hindi choirs. I was in the front row. How could I manage it? Rather, how did the choir directors tolerate me? Many of those songs have not been recorded. The only explanation I can think of was that my voice was very soft and did not disturb their vocal effect.

To learn a musical instrument was and still is my greatest desire. I started learning harmonium. The pundit wanted to teach me the notes sa - ri - ga - ma - pa - tha - sa. I played it after learning correct fingering from a typist. Then on the fifth day the musician told me to sing it out loud along with playing the instrument. I did it without showing any hesitation. It did not take long to give his verdict. "You can never sing scientifically. If you cannot sing, you cannot learn a musical instrument. You can use this time and energy for something useful". I did not want to give up. Yet I knew that I could not sing scientifically. Hence I gave up learning harmonium. But I said to myself that one day I would learn some musical instrument which would not require my singing.

Drama was an important event in Jabalpur. Once a year the staff and the students worked hard to put on a good religious drama. "The Robe" was presented every year. I went for drama practice. They gave me

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two minor roles. The first was to stand on the stage as one of the soldiers and the second was as one of the shepherds or disciples. Although it was not any significant role, I was happy that I was in it. The following years I was an inevitable actor in the college drama. The Easter pageant presented by the Audio Visual Department depicted the angels blowing the trumpet from the top of the college building. One of the four angels at the top of the building just looked down as the flash lights focussed on the angels giving an impression that these angels were standing up in the dark air. A fear entered his head and a shiver went all over his body along with the thought that if he slips from the small table where he was standing nothing would remain of him except the dust to which man has to go ultimately. If that had happened you would not have read this book.

## STUDIES IN ENGLAND

During my fourth year in Jabalpur I was selected to go to study for one year in England on a scholarship from the World Council of Churches. I was so happy to get this privilege to go abroad. As soon as I graduated from Jabalpur, I returned to Trichur. On 25th, June 1961, I was ordained as a Deacon.

Passport was a problem. There was no passport office in Kerala. I applied to Madras office for a passport. Since I had spent the previous four years in Jabalpur, they asked me to get a police enquiry report from Jabalpur. It was delayed as usual. I could not sail on the day fixed earlier. I went to Madras and begged for a passport. I was disappointed as I did not get it. To add to my disappointment my pocket was picked while travelling in an electric train. With no money to buy a ticket to return to Trichur I got help from a friend. I was happy that I was able to return, although without a passport.

A few months later, the passport arrived. I made a booking in a ship called M. V. Asia. My Church was not in a position to pay for my passage, I did

not want to ask my parents because they had nine other children to support. My salary as a Deacon was only forty rupæes per month, It was not advisable for me to borrow money as there was no hope of returning it, as my salary even after foreign studies was not going to be more than a hundred rupees a month.

When the scholarship authorities in Geneva knew of the actual situation they offered to buy me a "return" ticket. My English was so poor that I understood that return ticket meant a ticket for a return journey to and fro! I thanked them for their kindness to buy ticket for return journey. My father borrowed money to buy a ticket from Bombay to London by ship. The last lap from Italy to London was by a train and boat which was included in the ship's ticket.

The Geneva people must have laughed at my ignorance. I wrote to them that my English teachers in school and college never taught me that return ticket meant journey to and fro. They were magnanimous enough not to put all the blame on me. I do not know whether they put the blame on the teachers who taught me English. The thousand three hundred rupees spent by my father was reimbursed to him from Geneva.

When ticket was bought for me to sail on October 9, I thought most of the preparations were over. I had booked a train ticket to leave Trichur on 5th October. But my paternal grandfather suddenly became ill and died on 4th October. His funeral was to take place at 5'0 clock on 5th October, exactly the same time my train was to leave Trichur.



"Let the dead bury their dead" was the statement our Lord Jesus Christ that came to my mind first. I thought that I should not neglect my obligation to my grandfather. If it was a wedding or some other joyous occasion I would have ignored. My participation at the funeral would give solace to my bereaved grandfather. So after burying him I rushed to pack my things to catch night train. Although not a direct train, I eventually reached Bombay after changing trains.

On 7th October, 1961 I reached Bombay in the morning. Many people were waiting for me at the platform. Although I had not known me, they came to meet me responding to a telephone message from Trichur. Thanks to the nice arrangements! By the grace of God I was able to do what others had told me as almost impossible. At French consulate I was told that the minimum time required for obtaining a transit visa is one day after submitting the application. But I demanded it in one minute. Finally a compromise with in one hour! Italian consulate too showed a friendly (rather sympathetic) attitude to me. After obtaining these visas I got the ticket from the shipping company. Thus the busy "three hours" anticipated by me came to a favourable end.

8th October. I could complete the article I had begun to write in the railway station. A few letters too were written. I could also contact Trichur over the telephone three times and said good-bye to my relatives and parents from a distance of more than a thousand miles.

9th October. Our ship M. V. Asia sailed away from Bombay. We did not know when it started sailing. We

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were in the dining hall looking at the unfamiliar Italian food and menu and learning to eat in the way we were not used to. When we noticed through the window that we were moving, one by one we finished eating and went to the Upper deck to have a last look at our homeland.

### FAREWELL

I looked at the endless sea and turned to the homeland and said bye-bye. Of course there was none who knew me. In all the four directions I could see only the endless sea. There was no window for my cabin, which was in the bottom deck of the ship, I could see the waves coming and hitting the glass. It was entirely a new surrounding with new friends.

### DAILY WORSHIP

The worship and the Christian services in the ship made a strong appeal to me, as I was not expecting such chances during journey. The Italian ship had many Roman Catholics among the passengers. Roman Catholic mass was conducted every morning. Evening prayers were also conducted regularly. Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters of the Roman Church representing at least half a dozen countries took active part in it. They tried their best to bring lay people also to attend the services. It was a real challenge to people who forget God on such occasions and waste time for the pleasures of the world.

### TITHE

I could not but appreciate the "Lloyd Triestino" the owners of our ship in regard to the concession granted to the clergy. 10% of the total charge was given as a tithe

Churches and missions which are paying for their journey. This old Testament rule of one tenth as an offering could be a serious lesson for people engaged in other types of business too.

KARACHI

We were seeing land again from a distance. We knew the place we were nearing was Karachi. It was a part of our own land. But today? We could not walk through the streets without a transit card and permission from migration authorities. It was owing to the independence we fought for and attained in 1947. It was also a tragic example of religious fanaticism and intolerance of our fellowmen.

ADEN

The next stop after Karachi was Aden. We went on and visited the business place about six miles from the harbour. There were many new and big taxi cars more attractive than the cars owned by our millionaires. Aden was known as a place where things could be bought cheaply and taken abroad without duty in the port. Here we had the first sight of the Arab world.

OCTOBER

On Sunday I heard the announcement over the loudspeaker "Today is Sunday, the holy day for Christians. The ship will be conducted for Roman Catholics at the First Class and for the Protestants in the Tourist Class." I decided to attend both these morning worships after my morning prayer. Thus in one morning I could hear sermons, one from an Italian Jesuit Father and the other from a missionary from Scotland. Both people preached Christ from one book (Bible) although they worshipped separately.

## SUEZ

We slowly passed through the Suez Canal. On one side we saw Egypt and on the other side we were looking at Palestine. Here we were greeted by human beings on both sides. We were happy to see smiling human faces instead of water. We hoped to have a distant look at Mount Sinai, but we could not see it. It was about fifty miles away from us. We had a look at Suez town which was close to the canal.

## PORTSAID

Here we went on shore to see the land of Pharaoh. At that time it was Nasser's land. We searched for neighbouring Churches. But police did not understand English. It was night. Still we, three young people in cassocks, went out to find a Church. We saw a huge Church known as the French Cathedral of the Roman Catholic Church. It was the biggest Cathedral I had ever seen. President Nasser's photos were pasted on most of the buildings. One man came near us and told us that he was a Christian showing the sign of Cross on his hand. At the port we saw an English ship three times bigger than our ship. Then only we knew how small our ship was. It is true of human beings who think how great they are until they come in contact with real great men. Blessed is the man who can find out this fact earlier!

Leaving Port Said, we sailed to Naples, we had to stop our deck tennis games because the sea was a bit rough in the Mediterranean. White uniform was changed to black and black. Soon we reached Naples and my Roman Catholic friends disembarked there and went to Rome.

As I did not have anything else to do, I went out to one Roman Catholic Brother to take his luggage through customs etc. But the customs authorities at Naples do not take the trouble to open the boxes and check. It is possible for people to smuggle things from one country to another if the customs authorities are so kind as they sometimes are!

ES

One of the most beautiful places in the world is Naples. The buildings which were destroyed by bombs in the war and the most beautiful modern buildings all add to the beauty of the city. Some buildings were erected on the hills, making this beautiful city more crowded. Here I went to go out alone as my Catholic friends had already done in Rome. Although I could not speak Italian language I was respectfully allowed to go out and come in without producing the passport. When I saw a cameraman taking my picture and a man in uniform saluting me, I understood the respect they gave to the man in the black cassock. I was greeted by a Rikshaw-driver who asked whether I was a Catholic. I nodded my head expressing the approval, but it did not mean Roman Catholic, but the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of the East. I did not know the man nor could he understand English. Otherwise I could have explained to him about the Portuguese persecutions of our forefathers in India or about the Nestorian controversy of the fifth century!

From Naples, we sailed to Genoa, another part of Italy. While leaving Naples, we saw one of the ship's crew members coming running to board the ship. He was late

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by a few seconds. But the ship had started moving on slowly. Suddenly he shouted at a motor boat which was in the sea. He got into the boat and came near the ship. He was greeted by us who were on the upper deck. He jumped from his boat to another boat which took him near the ship and with the help of a rope he came inside the ship. We saw two passengers trying to get into the ship. But it was too late. It is typical of most of us who do things at the last moment !

### GENOA

All the remaining passengers disembarked at Genoa. One Roman Catholic priest came near me and smiled. I returned the greeting with a similar smile. He asked something in Italian. I smiled again. He probably tried French. I smiled again. He asked in Latin. I did not understand. He began to wonder "How can a man be a clergyman without learning Latin which is the ecclesiastical language." He uttered a single word "quovadis." It was a word familiar to me. Still I could not remember the meaning. It means, where are you going? When he failed to make me understand, he went to a Jesuit priest and asked about me who replied that I was going to London. With a smile of satisfaction he came to me and said "London. Anyhow he did not ask me to return to Rome.

I went around to see Genoa city. I saw underground roads to cross from one side of the road to the other without the trouble of traffic. When I went into one of the underground roads, some Italians were looking at me in a strange manner. I began to wonder whether I was go-

wrong place. I began to ask myself whether this was leading to a cinema house, liquor shop or such where I did not wish to go. Soon I found that I was not mistaken. I reached the other side of the road without being embarrassed.

As I had to wait till night to catch the train to London I had to write either letters or some articles about my journey. But there was no ink in my pen as I had already written one article and a few letters during the journey. I went to the shops to buy ink. When I asked for ink, the shop keeper smiled and when the shop keeper queried what I wanted, it was my turn to laugh. The language was the barrier that separated us. Finally in another shop, I found a man who understood the meaning of "ink" and so I bought it. In one shop I saw biscuits and bought a packet but I could not know the cost of it. After managing to pay for it, I went to a fruit shop and bought some oranges. Here I acted like a dumb because I knew that my speaking in English was of no use to him. I enjoyed my trip in Italy.

S

Leaving Genoa by night train the next morning we reached ourselves in Paris. Here too we had a lot of fun because of language difficulty. None of the officers in the railway Station knew English language. I had never thought that Paris, the most fashionable city in the world, would cause a language difficulty to tourists. We had to make our guess about the next train going to London. Some people went by one train. I do not know whether we reached London or some other place. Those who

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followed me had a more comfortable journey than the rest who claimed to know all about the journey.

I put my luggage in one train and about to board the other train, the attendant came and lifted my luggage and deposited it on the platform. Though he offered no explanation for performing this free service to me, I guessed that he was saving me a lot of trouble from going into the opposite direction, where the language I speak, English, would be a stranger than in Paris. When I saw the name Calais on another train I pushed myself into it.

### ENGLISH CHANNEL

It took 90 minutes to cross the channel by boat. As there was wind and waves, this one and a half hour journey was worse than the long journey we had in an air conditioned Italian ship. But it was not the worst in the English Channel, because the previous week they had to cancel the ferry service due to storms etc.

### DOVER

Holding a suitcase in the left hand, a still bigger one in the right and a bag hanging from my neck, I walked out of the boat in the rain, through the customs, to the train with a satisfaction of reaching the last lap of my journey. I travelled by train from Dover to London looking at the illumination in that evening. At 8 p. m. I reached Victoria Railway station.

### LONDON

As it was the case in Bombay Victoria station, an unknown friend was waiting for me at London Victoria s



Holding my photo in his hand, he came near me and told me that my worry was over. He informed me that he had come to take me to the place where I was supposed to stay that night. He was a student in the University of London who was sent by the Scholarship Secretary of the British Council of Churches.

Here was the end of my long journey. It was not very long. It took only 15 days. In this fortnight I saw many things and met many people. Although the journey was long, I said to myself "here is the beginning." It marked the beginning of my stay in England.

The next day I was taken to my Seminary, St. Boniface College, Warminster in Wiltshire which is the fourth year course of the King's College, London. During my studies I had the privilege of visiting many Cathedrals and places of historic importance. My study in England gave me an incentive to do research into ancient documents and manuscripts.

Coventry is a growing city about 100 miles north of London. Two days out of the two weeks I spent there, the roads were covered with snow. I was happy to see snow fall. It was my first sight of the kind. I am sure my readers in India would have enjoyed it. The children were taking the maximum advantage of their "Vac" by playing in the snow, making snowman and sledging on the big fields covered with snow. I saw a big statue on the roadside which looked like a marble statue, but in fact it was a snowman. Most part of this city was destroyed by bombs during the second World War. Now it is being re-constructed. A beautiful Cathedral is growing out of the ruins of the destroyed one. I attended many

services on various occasions in this half-buried Cathedral.

In London I had a busy time. It is not easy to see the various places of interest during the stay of three weeks in London. There are many churches and religious institutions to be visited. I visited two Cathedrals, there is the famous Westminster Abbey. My brother-in-law Alexander Alex who stopped in London on his way to the United States was with me when I went to see this historic Church built in 1065. What surprised us was the simple old wooden chair which is known as the Coronation Chair. This old chair was made for King Edward I and has since been used at the coronation of every sovereign. The following three events are of importance from the point of view of our Church. These three events made my stay in London more useful than all other things I saw during that period,

1) Study of the Assyrian Mission. I was looking for an opportunity to study about our Church in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Persia etc. The Assyrian Mission of the Archbishop of Canterbury which worked in the Middle East since 1886 to the time of the first World War published quarterly papers and a few books about the Assyrian Church. The best place to look for the records of this Mission is the Library of the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth. My study in the Lambeth Palace Library has given me a good deal of material of interest to the members of our Church. After that study I published "Lambeth Series" the *Voice of the East*.

2) My visit to the British Museum, was a useful one. There are many things to see and millions of volumes

I saw some Syriac Manuscripts of the Bible. What I specially requested them was to show me the manuscript of the book written by Nestorius entitled "*Tagurtha De Heracleides*" which is often translated into English as the "Book of Heracleides". I was happy to see this theological work of Nestorius, because I had used the translation of this book in my B. D. thesis. I was very happy when they expressed their desire to have our Syriac-English Magazine the (*Voice of the East*) in the Oriental Department of the British Museum. They expressed their desire to buy all the Syriac and Aramaic publications of Mar Thoma Press in the Oriental Department.

B) It was a pleasant surprise indeed to hear from Mr. J. H. Wales, who was the honorary Secretary of the Assyrian Society of Great Britain, that he learned about my coming to England through the "*Voice of the East*." That monthly publication serves its purpose of keeping contact among faithful members of the Assyrian Church, whether they live in India, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Lebanon, U.S.A or England. I had a small gathering of Assyrians at his house who came to meet me. It was a time of joy for me to meet friends from Mosul and Bagdad and to talk about our Church in the Middle East, a part of the world which I was going to visit.

They were happy to know that I could read Syriac language when I read from the Syriac section of the "*Voice of the East*." Nevertheless, I was sorry that I was not able to speak in Syriac language. Of course, in the past I have been proud of the privilege of preaching in three entirely different languages. God willing, Aramaic will be the fourth language in which I would attempt to preach. Is it not a

great privilege to preach in the language in which our Lord Jesus Christ preached?

A man and his wife came in. Respecting the western custom of standing up when a woman comes in (for the information of Indian readers!), I stood up. The man shook my hands and introduced himself as Aprem Kellaitha. I struggled hard with my memory to identify the man. He hastened to say that Kellaitha was a familiar name to me. Soon it came to my mind. He is the son of the late Kasha Joseph. Although I have not met Kasha Joseph during my visit to India, (It was many years before my birth) I had heard quite a lot about this great scholar and his Assyrian schools.

#### AT CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge is a city with a wonderful inheritance from the past; an inheritance which shows in its fine colleges, buildings, its Churches, and its culture. The benefits of past patronage are today being shared by an ever-increasing crowd of students and appreciated by a constantly growing number of visitors. You may ask "what is the necessity for a deacon of the Church of the East to be in Cambridge?" That is very simple. It is the place where the Patriarch of this church was a student in 1926. The first day in Cambridge the Franciscan priest with whom I was staying began to recall his old days in school. At Westcott House the Patriarch and the priest were fellow students.

"Mar Shimun was a fearless hockey player. I used to play against him," was his first statement. I was pleased to hear that and I said "Yes. My Patriarch is courageous

only in games but in life also the proud decedent of  
chednezer will show his courage."

When I read the translations of the works of Mar  
Abdisho, Mar Aprem and Mar Narsai and the translations  
of the services of Holy Qurbana, Baptism, Burial, Matri-  
mony and Ordination for various ranks, I rejoiced in being  
able to know many of the things I wanted to know. Of  
course, I want to warn my readers stating that these transla-  
tions may not be in the way we want them to be translated.  
The translations have been made by Roman Catholics,  
Anglicans, Presbyterians etc who perhaps do not know our  
liturgy sufficiently. They were good scholars in our  
ecumenical language. However, they have never practised  
the faith or never were under the canons which they have  
derived from the Synods. It presents a challenge to all  
members of our Church to think seriously the ways and  
means of preserving the faith of our fathers and preserve  
their writings and add to the wealth of literature of our  
present Church, the growth of which ceased after the days  
of Mar Abdisho Metropolitan and Mar Thimotheus II, the  
fifteenth century Patriarch. I am sorry to say that today  
there are not many Syriac scholars like the Cambridge  
scholars seventy years ago. Perhaps today that duty has  
been left to the growing generation of the Church of the  
East. For me it was a renewal of my decision to learn  
more of our ecclesiastical language than what I knew then.

For the encouragement of women I must add the  
following information. Two of these Cambridge scholars  
were women. They learned old Syriac and Arabic. In the  
library of Westminster College I saw a copy of the oldest  
Latin New Testament written in the fourth century which

is a copy of that of the second century. This was brought by these women from Mount Sinai. These two Syriac scholars were twin sisters. These women translated the commentary of New Testament written by one of our Bishops, Mar Eshodad of Maru or Merv. They restored some of the writings of Mar Aprem such as his commentary on the Diatessaron of Tatian. I was grateful to read many useful explanations on the difficult passages of the New Testament.

One question arose in my mind. When is the day the women of our Church start writing articles or books? We have women of education. Will they ever think of doing at least a small portion of what the women of other Churches have done for our Church? If they spend on writing the energy they use for superfluous things (I am not making any allegations against anybody and I hope my friends will read it with christian charity) this wish can be fulfilled. It is always encouraging occasionally to see the women's column in our Malayalam magazine and I only hope they will take it as a challenge and will make the best use of their talents.

Back to Cambridge I would like to welcome you to the famous King College Chapel. Their choir is world famous. Evening Service is sung and it is greatly appreciated by the large number of visitors who reach there to enjoy the music of this divine worship. For the thousands of visitors who have been there the music will be a memorable experience of their lives. Here again we should be proud of the great Church music of our Church for which we owe to Mar Aprem, Mar Narsai, Mar Bawai and the monks of Beth Abhe and other monasteries who brought name and fame to the music of our

Church. It is recorded that on one occasion because of the beauty of the singing of one Reader of this famous monastery the preacher confessed that he has forgotten his meditations!

Once again I had the opportunity of living with those who have dedicated their lives for the monastic or religious life. The Society of St. Francis is an Anglican religious community where the educated men have taken the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Those at Cambridge teach in the colleges, always ready to give spiritual guidance to young men who are in special need of guidance. With seven daily prayers in addition to Eucharist the place stayed gave the impression of an old monastery. It created in me a challenge to restore the lost heritage of the ancient Church of the East.

## SHORT STAY AT OXFORD

Cambridge and Oxford are the two famous Universities of England. Some prefer Cambridge, while others think Oxford is better. It is difficult to determine which of these two is greater in academic status.

There is fierce competition in the annual boat race. It is like a national event. Even members of the royal family used to witness this boat race. The old students of each university gathered on either side of the river to encourage their crew. I watched it on the television.

I enjoyed visiting the various colleges in Oxford as I did in Cambridge. I stayed in the Pusey House, a small house where some scholars stayed and conducted their research. The Bodleian is the famous library at Oxford. I felt that as far as the Syriac manuscripts are concerned

it is not upto the Cambridge University library or the Oriental Department of the British Museum in London.

Oxford is connected with many important events of the Reformation in England. The Cowley Fathers (Society of Saint John the Evangelist) have their mother house in Oxford. I stayed for a few days there too. Being a monastic community the rules are strict. We cannot talk in rooms, in the corridors or in the dining room. I began to wonder where can I open my mouth. Of course, in the chapel we can read psalms etc.

In the dining hall we were allowed to speak on festival days; that too after the abbot has begun the conversation. After eating food we have to wash our dishes. There too we could only look at each other and perhaps smile but not make any noise. A man like myself who is not very good at being silent for a long time began to feel bored until I heard a soft knock on my door. A Japanese student who was also a guest like me already entered my room. He began to talk to me. Being a strict disciplinarian reminded him of the rules of that institution. He replied with a grin on his face that the rules were applicable only to the inmates and not to the guests. I told him to talk in a low voice. Otherwise we both would no more be guests there.

I was glad to meet Fr. K. A. George of the Orthodox Syrian Church, staying with the Cowley Fathers. When he came to know that I was regularly receiving Malayalam Manorama newspaper from Kerala he was anxious to read it. How anxious the Kerala people are to know the news of our home state, Church, friends etc! Further it was



for us just to talk in our mother tongue after a long

## ASSYRIAN SERVICE

"An Assyrian service is a rare event in England," reported the "Daily Telegraph" published in London. Of course it was a happy information for many friends that Assyrian Evensong was going to take place in London. "Church Times," the Anglican weekly also gave publicity to this news. It was arranged for Whitsunday according to the Eastern Calendar and Trinity Sunday of western reckoning. Whitsunday is another word for Pentecost. I have written about the love of English people for abbreviations. I was told by a student at Oxford that they get one week's vacation for wit (He did not mean wit, but whit, Whitsunday !)

The Assyrian Evensong was sung at St. Barnabas Church at a place called Ealing in London. As a happy and proud coincidence I discovered that it was the place where the services of our Church were conducted by His Holiness Mar Shimun Patriarch and His Grace Mar Yosip Manishu Metropolitan during their respective visits some years ago. The vicar of the parish was happy to put the church at our disposal for our service because of his love and interest in, our Church. He was present throughout the service.

It was a good ecumenical Assyrian gathering as the congregation consisted of Assyrians who belong to the Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox and Armenian Churches in addition to the faithful members of the Holy Apostolic Church of the East. As a symbol of friendship of the

Assyrian Church and their Muslim neighbours (Of course this long existed friendship had another side of enmity which has expressed itself on many occasions) there was an Arab girl of Moslem faith who attended our services. The priests and members of Anglican Church present there bore witness to the long existing friendship of our Church with the England which was strengthened since the days of Assyrian Missions.

It had a universal significance for the members of the Assyrian Church. In that worship there were our people from all the parts of our Church. I cannot think of any other occasion when the members of our Church from Persia, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, America, England and India united in one worship. There have never been such opportunities before. I rejoiced at this service which gave an opportunity to pray for all our bishops in various parts of the world.

People from Trichur were able to participate in the service. Dr. O. R. Timothy who was working in London of course, took a real interest in arranging this service. His wife, Dr. Molly Timothy who was working in Birmingham, came to London just to attend this service. Lt. Colonel J. P. Anthony from the High Commission of India was also present with his wife. Lt. Colonel Anthony, who is a brother of my uncle Colonel Paul, was assistant military attache in Indian High Commission.

## A FORTNIGHT AT CANTERBURY

People of Canterbury cannot forget the celebration of Holy Communion in the language of Jesus conducted by a young Patriarch who was not even seventeen at the

I rejoiced in being able to visit that Cathedral which is a place of many historic events.

Canterbury Cathedral is a place of pilgrimage to Roman Catholics as well as to Anglicans even today. There are many places that attract the attention of tourists including the place where St. Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered. The tombs of many of the Archbishops are there. The consecration of the Archbishops takes place in that beautiful Cathedral. Only a part of the Cathedral was destroyed by bombing during the war. The survival of the Cathedral including its coloured glass windows is a miracle. An old layman said that in that famous Cathedral some six years ago they had the privilege to hear the benediction pronounced after an evening service by Grace Mar Yosup Khananishu, the senior Metropolitan of the Syrian Church.

I too dreamed to go and study at least for a short time at Augustine's College in this historic place. An opportunity was presented through the summer courses they offer which give the privilege to many people especially Anglicans from all over the world to come and study there. Though I was not an Anglican I managed to get admitted. It benefited me much.

The good collection of books about our Church is something that attracted me. I was happy to see many translations from the Syriac books about which I was not aware of before. My only regret was that there was not enough time to finish reading all these books. After a fortnight when we finished the course, I myself had to return these books back to library. If there was some electric fan it would have helped me to return these books quickly.

to the library. When other members of the course found the loads of books I was returning to the library they thought that I was joking. It was true that nobody could finish reading all these books in a fortnight. I had to satisfy their curiosity by explaining that I have read only a few pages from each of these dozens of books I was returning.

I have the regret that perhaps I may not get another opportunity in my life to finish reading all these books. Most of these books are out of print and not available. The second hand books are also difficult to find. How nice would be if the members of our Church had the opportunity to read these essential books. Unfortunately our Seminary Library in India does not have these books, I was very glad to get a couple of these valuable books for which I had searched many shops at Cambridge and Oxford. The only seminary of our Church does not have a copy of the translation of the book of Nestorius.

Just on a side of this famous college we see the ruins of the famous Benedictine Abbey. This Abbey has played a very important part in the history of the Church in England. The monks of this monastery used to bury the dead bodies of the Archbishops and used to elect the new Archbishops. But history has recorded its unpleasant aspects also. The rivalries of the monks with the Cathedral and other authorities of the Church are also recorded in history. You may feel sorry for the abuses of the monastic movements through the rivalries of certain monks. Today as a result it is in ruins. When we stood in the ruins and the Bishop celebrated an outdoor communion in this place we were reminded of the importance of the part played by that Abbey.

My stay in Canterbury is important to the members of the Church. I was able to meet an old friend of our youth and to whom we owe a great debt. Squadron Leader George S. Reed came to serve our Church in Constantinople in 1905 as a missionary of the Archbishop's Eastern Mission. He worked there till the beginning of the war as a lay member of the mission. He was the bursar of the mission and was the main "Hakim" of the mission locally after the death of W. H. Browne in 1910. Mr. Reed helped our Church at the end of the war. I cannot imagine the joy of the Assyrians when they found their Captain Reed coming to help them and share in their sufferings. He began to recall many other incidents in his long relationship with our Church. He talked about the time he helped the Patriarchal family to escape in his plane from Iraq to Cyprus during the terrible massacre of 1933. In retirement he still remembered his Syriac and many happy memories he had carried with him. He sang a stanza from a prayer book in Syriac. He presented me his old manuscript of our Holy Liturgy which has been in his possession for more than half a century.

I may attempt to make clear some of the feelings I had when I attended a service in the Canterbury Cathedral. Of course the morning worship had its ceremonial glory especially as the Archbishop of Canterbury was present. In addition to this a Bishop from the Old Catholic Church of Germany was also present in his colourful robes. The beautiful Canterbury choir added to the beauty of worship. The well trained voices of the boys from the choir school appealed to me as against the untrained singing in other Churches.

The evening services in the Cathedral was led by the Lord Mayor of Canterbury who happens to be a priest and a member of the Cathedral staff. In England, it is not usual for priests to be elected as Mayors and civic rulers as religious leaders. But it shows the interest of the Church in the secular world. As the Church is in the world we cannot escape it. So here is a clergyman who decided to face his responsibilities to the state. On the other hand I saw a man from the secular world who decided to do his duty towards the Church and decided to serve the Lord. I was a retired Brigadier who was studying in St. Augustine College and hoping to be ordained as a deacon next year and as a priest in the following year as is the usual way in the Church of England. I felt privileged of being a fellow student of a Brigadier. When I thought of that service which was conducted by Mayor of the city and the Brigadier seminary student and a Squadron Leader who acted as the steward, I wished for such participation of the secular world in our services.

I should also make a point about the number of visitors that come to the Cathedral every day. Of course most of them come there only to enjoy the beauty. But there are others who come to worship and pray. I have visited more than a dozen Cathedrals and have found people on their knees. It makes me to think that in spite of the attractions of the world that mislead many of our people today, at least some people find time to pray even on the weekdays. We must be thankful for Churches that are always kept open. We must show an example to others that Church is a house of prayer and the children of God can come there to pray. Many peo

do not get opportunity at home to spend sometime quiet meditation can come to our Churches for that. In these huge Cathedrals where thousands of people come and visit there is a separate chapel for people to pray, and silence is strictly observed in these chapels.

## TRANSIT THROUGH EUROPE

Leaving Canterbury, I spent a few days in London trying to get visas and completing my studies. It may surprise some of you that I had to get nine visas for the return journey while I did not need to get any visa to stay and study in England. I was looking forward to see Paris. When I left London Railway station my second brother-in-law Dr. George was at the station to see me off. The same evening I reached Paris and there were other students also going to Geneva and we went to have a look at Paris. My companions were soon tired and returned and so I had to find my way alone. It was very difficult without knowing the language. Finally by underground railway I reached the main station just one minute before the train was to leave for Geneva. Next day we were received at Geneva station by the Administrative assistant of the Scholarship Secretary of the World Council of Churches. I spent the next three weeks at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, near Geneva

### THREE WEEKS AT GENEVA

Thirty minutes after the electric train had pulled out of Geneva's Railway Station it stopped twelve miles away at



The tiny Swiss village of Celigny, gateway to the Chateau de Bossey. A short drive from the Celigny Railway Station took us to the Ecumenical Institute which has been described as "the jewel of the World Council of Churches." The beautiful and the world famous fountain of Lake Geneva was visible from this Institute. As it was the summer season the natural beauty was increased by the trimmed hedges and the myriad of flowers.

This building was constructed in the 11th century. An old tower dating from this period still stands to form a part of the chapel. The World Council of Churches bought this property with donations which mostly came from America. It was Dr. Visser't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who recognized the need for such a place to train laymen as he was able to foresee the emergence of a responsible laity as a sign of new life after the Second World War.

Since those early post-war years, the programme of the Ecumenical Institute has been greatly expanded. Each summer, short but intensive educational courses are held at Bossey for laymen, theological students, ministers and missionaries on furlough. Special conferences are also conducted for various professional groups. Doctors, nurses and pastors have wrestled with the problem of increasing depersonalisation in medicine; educators have studied the Christian concept of education and the role of the Gospel in secular education; and Church architects have met at Bossey to consider the matter of Church building and town planning. The most effective institution at Bossey is the Graduate School of Ecumenical studies which is conducted in co-operation with the Faculty of Theology of the University of Geneva.

I was one of the sixty seven participants of the Theological students' course. I was the only one to represent India. The theme of the course was "Main streams of Christianity. Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal views of the Church and its mission." One of the main speakers of the course was Professor G. Rupp from England who gave very useful lectures on "Main streams of Christianity." His scholarly utterances pregnant with real English humour was a pleasant surprise to me who was returning from England, to discover at last (for the first time!) how amusing an old English man could be. The lectures of Professor Nissiotis made me to think how much interest a layman of the Orthodox Church had taken in the field of theology and ecumenics. As a matter of fact many leading theologians in the Greek Orthodox Church are laity and many seminaries have employed lay theologians to train the clergy. Perhaps some of my readers cannot understand how laymen can teach theology. But the Church is making adjustments according to the world situation. The layman has begun to realise his responsibility in the total life of the Church.

The various lectures given from time to time made us to think deeply into the various issues that divide the Body of Christ, the Church on earth. There was a Pentecostal Pastor from New York who argued his case and emphasised his convictions on speaking in tongues etc which looked to others as an overemphasis on some of the neglected doctrines and customs. I silently observed the Protestants protesting against some of the "uncharitable" comments made about them by the members belonging to the other streams of Christianity.

It is a custom at Bossey to receive the Roman Catholic servers and participants to the various courses conducted here. We were much benefitted by a good team of Catholic hosts who entered into the life of Bossey by their active participation in discussion as well as in the extra curricular activities. We usually know very little of others. On the main issues touching the Roman Catholic Church these theologians spoke convincingly and explained to us what they really believed and not what others spoke about their belief. When they worshipped together in the same stone chapel in which a simple wooden Cross is central, and singing songs along with the Orthodox and Protestant brethren, many of us felt that a silent revolution was taking place. Of course like me they also did not receive Holy Communion with the Protestants. The Catholic priests conducted their Mass separately. Still it was the first time for many of us to see the Pentecostal Pastor and the Roman Catholic Monk worshipping together. Once the Catholic host gave us a "Demonstration Mass" and explained to us the meaning of the Latin Liturgy.

I enjoyed listening to the lectures with the help of the simultaneous translation into French, German and English. There were participants who knew all these three languages. Some knew two languages. So when the participants spoke either in French or in German, I had to listen to it with the aid of the earphone. (By the way, when the discussions became too much theological and difficult to understand I used the earphone to listen the German and the French to hear how it sounded like!) The Greek layman who used to sit next to me spoke in German. When he wanted to ask any question to me, I had to listen to it through the earphone after it was translated into English by somebody

sitting away from us. My reply to him also had to undergo the same operation. I should think that if the people who built the Tower of Babel had known this difficulty, they would not have dared to begin the construction of the Tower which resulted in the confusion of languages!

The extra-curricular life at Bossey is also interesting. People from various countries live, eat and play together. The main game is volley ball. In England this game is not so popular as in Russia or in South India. So I was happy to get a chance after one year to play this game. Soon I realised that it was not so easy to play the game with a cassock on. The Roman Catholic priests and an Anglican Bishop played with me without their cassocks. Still I remained very conservative. Perhaps this gave a chance to some of my friends to think that I was a little narrowminded as they always saw me in the games court fully dressed up in collar and cassock.

The Dining Hall also added to our ecumenical and international experience. Very interesting theological discussions took place at the table. If I sat with a Catholic at the Breakfast table discussing about the Monastic life, I used to discuss the Nestorian controversy with a Protestant at lunch. I would listen patiently to hear about the Revival in the African Church from a friend from Kenya at the Dinner table. Before the meals the prayer was offered in different languages of the world in rotation. Twice it was my turn to say the "grace" in Malayalam. Nobody understood the meaning. But they attended reverently. The international volunteers who serve the meals are dubbed as the "Blue Angels" because of their blue smokes and dresses.

There were 11,000 volumes in the library of the Ecumenical Institute. For the books which are not available in the Bossey Library, arrangements had been made to borrow the books from the Library at the World Council of Churches head-quarters at 17, Route De Malagnon, Geneva. In my leisure time I went through the books in the Library to see the name of our Church listed in the various publications. I was glad to know that the Holy Church of the East was represented in the various ecumenical conferences such as Edinburgh (1937), Oxford (1937), Lund, Sweden (1952), Evanston, U. S. A (1954) and New Delhi (1961) after making a study of the part played by the Church of the East, which of course is not significant, in the ecumenical field, I hoped that my coming to Bossey would be another chapter in the ecumenical history of our Church. I thanked God for getting the honour to be the first man from the Church of the East to come to the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey.

I cannot forget the difficulty the authorities of the Ecumenical Institute had in classifying the participants into various groups according to their religious background. The Orthodox Churches came under the stream called Catholic. However my Greek Orthodox friend hesitated to include me in their group. He was wondering how a "Nestorian" could be included among the Orthodox. He was ignorant of the fact that the Church of the East was considered as the one, true, Orthodox, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which was holding fast to the faith of our forefathers which was once delivered to the Saints in spite of the persecutions which this Church unfortunately had to undergo. Finally I was grouped with them. But at the time of worship I read out "Mother of Christ" instead of Mother of God which was printed in the book according to the

belief of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Some people did not notice the difference. But some Orthodox brethren discovered that something had gone wrong somewhere. Anyhow one of my Orthodox friends, who was doing his doctorate at Oxford University commented. "It is a matter of conscience." People who knew the Nestorian controversy understood the reason why a member of the Holy Church of the East changed the title "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*) into "Mother of Christ" (*Christotokos*).

We had opportunities to know "a little bit" (a classical expression of Hans Rudi Weber, the Chairman of the Course) of the national life village congregation at Celigny. The Swiss national festival happened to fall during our course. So we had to celebrate it with the usual Camp Fire. In fact it was an international festival as the various programmes were given by different groups from Asia, Africa, America, Europe etc. During the picnic on another day when we saw that a Roman Catholic Monk from America, who had lost one of his legs during the last World War, was driving his car with the help of a wooden leg to join us in the social life of Bossey, one Protestant friend remarked "The monks too are human beings." Our conception of monks is the people far removed from the life of the community as totally wrong." Yes, indeed the Protestants too have begun to appreciate some of the salient features of the Monastic life which is found in most of the older Churches.

When we left Bossey, we were fully aware of the challenges facing our Churches today. The dimensions of our understanding increased. During my stay there I tried to work as an ambassador of our Church, the first of its kind to Bossey, fostering better relationships and

Understanding with other participants whom I had the privilege to meet. As a result I happened to know more about them and many of them knew more about us.

## IN ROME, BUT NOT AS A ROMAN

From the Protestant capital in Geneva I moved to the Roman Catholic headquarters at Vatican. The residence of the Pope is in Vatican. This tiny religious state is situated at the heart of the city of Rome.

Rome has been a place of religious pilgrimages for many centuries. Since the time of Paul, Rome has played an important part in the history of the Christian Church. An American priest working in the Secretariat for Unity is very happy to hear from me about the progress of our Church and expressed his desire to receive the "*Voice from the East*" and to know more about our Church. I also told him that we were more in number than Cardinal Tisserant had mentioned in his book. The idea of re-union with Rome is not so easy as Cardinal had hoped. Our Church being an ancient Church in the Christendom, it cannot agree with Rome on many points, especially on many doctrines which the Roman Church has introduced without consulting other ancient Churches like our Church. He added that Cardinal Bea has sent an invitation to our Church to send an observer to the coming Vatican Council.

In Vatican I was privileged to see the famous Vatican Museum. It will take many days to see all the things in detail. In one room I saw some Assyrian monuments, in another there were some Chinese inscriptions and so on. Among the Bibles exhibited in one room I was very happy

to see one Bible in the language of our Lord which our Church is using as our ecclesiastical language.

St. Peter's Church on the other side of Vatican is the biggest Church in the world. I cannot say how many times bigger this Church is in comparison to our "Big Church!" at Trichur. Students of history will recall the efforts behind the construction of this Church. You know how money was raised to build this biggest Church in the World for the glory of Apostle Peter and his successors. I climbed to the top of the tower of this Church to have a look at Vatican as well as Rome. Some years ago when I climbed the famous Taj Mahal in India, I felt tired. But St. Peter's was much more difficult than I could climb with all my efforts. I thought about the pilgrims who go to the top. We feel that our sins are forgiven by undergoing all the sufferings to reach the top. Of course the people who gave money to build that huge Church had believed that their sins were forgiven as they have exchanged forgiveness for money. Fund raising nuns were selling souvenirs on the roof of the Church. Some of the pilgrims (I do not know how to call them. Perhaps tourists will be a better word than pilgrims!) feel that this house of God has become a business place. They feel that there is no atmosphere for worship in the Church. I recalled to my mind the picture of Christ sending out all the merchants from the Temple in Jerusalem which was a house of prayer and not a place for business.

There are other places in Rome like Coliseum and the places where the early Christians were living and the place where these Christians were asked to give up their faith or die. There are many places to see like theological



colleges where students from all parts of the world come to learn. I will be very wrong if I leave an impression in your minds that everything in Rome is religious and holy. I even feel that Rome where the Holy Father (Pope) lives may be one of the most unholy cities in the world today. There is a fine contrast between day and night in Rome,

Leaving Rome I went to Naples, another beautiful city. This was my second visit to Naples as I had stopped a night there the previous year. I sailed from Naples and reached Athens in Greece. I went with my friend to his home near the harbour. While we were walking through the city I again felt that here is another unholy city. You see things which you will never see anywhere in the East. Of course all these people do not belong to Athens. They have come from distant places to Greece as pilgrims for the pleasures of the world for what is known in England as "Continental holiday." (I do not know the etymology of the word holiday. Some say it means Holy day.) My friend described my pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a holiday in the Holy Land.

I was welcomed in the house of my friend who is Greek Orthodox. They were speaking to me in Greek and I was trying hard to recall my New Testament Greek. After I heard the result of my B. D. examination of the Serampore Senate I have not read a single word in Greek thinking that I would never need it. But here I realised the need of it. This is to warn other students who burn their note books on hearing that they have passed the examination thinking that they will not need it any more.

In Athens I saw Acropolis. I stood on the hill from where St. Paul preached and according to tradition Dionysius

he Aeropagite was converted. It was at that place that St. Paul saw an altar dedicated to the unknown God. From Athens I went to Alexandria.

## ALEXANDRIA

When the ship stopped at Alexandria I was anxious to go and see some ancient Churches in the city. When I was stepping to this ancient city I was really thinking of Cyril of Alexandria. Some of my readers will brand me as a typical Nestorian! (Their judgement may be right in the ecclesiastical sense and not doctrinally.) As a student of history I was thinking of those unhappy days of christological controversies in which the Patriarchs of Alexandria played an important role especially in the fifth century. Some Church historians call them the Pharaohs. The Alexandrian Church which was the leading spirit in defending the faith of the fathers in the early ecumenical councils especially Nicea began to dwindle after the christological controversies. Today we ask where the theologians of Alexandria are, where the famous theological Library is.

I had the opportunity to visit the mosque also. This one was the private property of the King. After the abdication of King Farouk and the beginning of the military rule, all the royal establishments became the State property. Hospitals and schools are free for the public. Even the luxurious palace of King Farouk is open for the public to see. As I walked through the palace and the room where the King wrote the letter of abdication I was thinking of the end of the selfish people who look for their own pleasures and neglect the great responsibility which is laid on them. Let my readers seriously think about the

responsibility we have. It is getting late to think these things.

## CYPRUS

Next stop was Cyprus. Sergius Paulus, the Governor of Cyprus, was the first convert of St. Paul in Paphos, then capital of the island. The President of Cyprus Archbishop Makarios who was also the head of the Orthodox Church. I saw a Museum at Limassol near the place where our ship stopped. It was an ancient Church. For its existence for centuries, conquerors made it a fortress. Today in the underground of this Museum we can see the ruins of a Church. Things which are five thousand (five hundred) years old are kept there. Most of the Churches seen there today are of recent origin. All the ancient Churches have been destroyed by ambitious conquerors.

My interest in the Assyrian Church history had already brought me in contact with Cyprus. Since 1933 Mar Yonan and other members of the Patriarchal family resided on that small island. Before the beginning of the second World War, the hopes of the members of our Church were centered upon that small island. Arrangements were in good progress for the establishment of a theological College on that island which was to train the clergy of our Church. Of course political situations are changed. Today, all those Assyrians who were in Cyprus are in America. Cyprus is out of our ecclesiastical map today.

## BEIRUT

It was a Sunday. One priest in black cassock crossed the barrier of the harbour in Beirut. These days, because

of smuggling, visitors are not allowed to come near the ship. But this bearded priest was allowed to come in, I looked at him from the deck. I could guess that here was somebody waiting for me. It gave me encouragement that I was not going to strangers. I was going to a part of our Church where I would be most welcome. Soon a deacon and his brother managed to come inside. They were getting impatient. They were asking me to come out of the ship. They asked me whether I was tired. But forgetting the difficulties of the journey I went with them straight to Church for Qurbana service (Holy Communion). As it was Sunday some people had gathered there. I cannot describe their joy in seeing me and hearing me singing in their language.

Within four days I was able to meet all our clergy. My host Shammasha Israel was kind enough to take me to various places. He is the son of the Rev. Pathrose Khoury who had gone that year to New York as the priest of of our Mar Mari Church. He seemed to me a very active deacon in Beirut. He was teaching some of our children. Unfortunately in schools they learn only Arabic and French. So the Church had the burden of teaching Syriac because this Church had tried to preserve Syriac language in spite of oppressions. Of course the Syriac they speak today is different from the Old Syriac which we call Aramaic and claim to be the language which was spoken by Jesus. I was able to understand many words in modern Syriac but not the whole meaning.

Lebanon has more Christians than other Middle Eastern countries. Having a Christian President for Lebanon the Christian Church had freedom to work and propagate her faith. Our Church has about six thousand people one Archdeacon, three priests and nine deacons. It has

one good Chutch where the Archdeacon is the Vicar. There is another chapel where the majority of our people are residing. So at the time of the Patriarchal visit, a man named George Debbas had donated a plot of land where a Church in the name of Marth Maryam was to be erected very soon. Near the Church of Mar Gewargis school was under construction. I was given to understand that an episcopal residence would be erected on the second floor of the school building. They also hoped the new bishop for the diocese of Syria and Lebanon would choose this place as a suitable head quarters for the new diocese.

## DAMASCUS

A taxi was going to Damascus. But the taxi driver would not go till he got five passengers to fill his taxi. Here I was faced with the language problem. Nobody knew English. I did not know Arabic. After passing through the customs boundary etc my taxi returned as he is not allowed to take his car into the Syrian territory. Then I continued my journey in a bus. Again passport formalities. The police also did not know English. My passport is in English. As Syria was under French mandate the foreign language they have learned is French. In Damascus I was able to find a good hotel where English is spoken. Here I was able to meet Zaiya son of Malik Yakob. Malik Yakob was a well known layman of our Church. Zaiya, the second son of this leader was a deputy of the Syrian Parliament. Zaiya proudly stated that his people living in the Khabour valley in Syria may be the poorest Assyrians, but they are the best of all Assyrians. The people in Syria today are those who migrated in 1936. According to the figures supplied by Sir Anthony Eden in the British Parliament in 1936 the number of these people is about twenty

two thousand. Another trustworthy source puts it as twelve thousand only. At the same other sources persuade me to believe that the number is thirty thousand. Perhaps this is one of the many examples of oriental exaggeration. It is also possible that Assyrians in that area are a fast increasing people.

I had the opportunity to greet His Holiness Yakob III, the patriarch of the Orthodox Syrian Church, which is also known as the Jacobite Church. Damascus is the headquarters of the Patriarch. It is not a stronghold of Jacobites. I went to see the Cathedral Church and greeted the Patriarch. As His Holiness had spent some years in South India he speaks our Malayalam language. I was also privileged to take some photos. His Holiness commanded that I should take more photos after he had sit in the car. Although I did not have a flash bulb I took some more without caring for the light. Damascus has Churches of various denominations. But it is still a Muslim city. I was thinking of St. Paul who was converted on the road to Damascus and was baptised in that city.

At Damascus I also learned that His Holiness Mar Eashai Shimun, our Patriarch, was accorded a grand reception there a few months earlier. His Holiness ordained two priests and some deacons on that occasion. It was during his return trip from India via Tehran after consecrating a new Bishop for Iran in the person of Mar Khannanya Dinkha. Since Mar Shimun was an exile from Iraq since 1933 he was not allowed to enter Iraq during his visit to the neighbouring countries on the east and the west, i.e. Iran and Syria.

The political situation had turned better. The dissolved Syrian Parliament was revived again. We can hope that

The Church in Northern Syria will become a great force and a centre of our Church. It was the homeland of Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan then head of the Church of Malabar and India.

As I was not able to speak Arabic I waited and waited for many hours to get a taxi to go to Jerusalem. Later I was told to wait till the next day. But I managed to get to Amman the capital of Jordan

Then a stranger came to help me and interpreted for me and managed to get a taxi in the same evening to go to Jerusalem. When I reached Jerusalem, the principal of the Anglican St. George College had already made arrangements for my stay.

## IN THE HOLY LAND & IRAQ

Before I venture to write the last part of my stay abroad, during the return journey through the Persian Gulf, I will be failing in my duty if I do not describe some of the details of my journey in the Holy Land. I do not entertain any ambition that it is possible to describe the experiences in the Holy Land with pen and ink. It is a "journey of a life time," as some travel agencies advertise. It is an opportunity nobody can miss, if he can afford it. It is a wonderful experience. I am sure that all pilgrims (including the Tourists who pretend to be pilgrims!) will reach a consensus of opinion that it is a journey worth undertaking.

No doubt, the holy atmosphere maintained in many shrines, and holy places, is so dear to the heart of a Christian who makes his visit to such a place as the Holy land, after longing for a long time. We visit the Holy land to satisfy our spiritual ambition and to receive Blessings. Even the Kings of Europe used to come to the Holy land to receive Blessings. Many crusades were conducted to occupy the Holy Land by the Christians



Europe and Great Britain. The days of Crusaders are gone. Christians of today perhaps, are not as fanatic as their forefathers of the 12th and 13th centuries of this era.

"What do you mean by the Holy Land?" asked an educated youth of our church to me. Some readers may have the same doubt. "Holy Land" is the place that is considered holy because of the dwelling of the Son of God, when the "Word of God" took flesh and dwelt among us on this earth as fully Man, for the salvation of mankind about 2000 years ago.

The "Holy Land" was known as Palestine. However today the political map has been changed considerably since the days of the iron rule of Rome. During my visit in 1962 the "Holy Land" was divided between two countries. One is the little Hashmite Kingdom of Jordan, which is ruled by King Hussain. The other is the newly created State of Israel ruled by the Jews. However a visit to the Holy Land will be incomplete without visiting Israel, as Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee etc are in Israel's territory.

Today the Jews and the Muslims are in bitter enmity, especially after the establishment of a separate country for the Jews. Muslims do not think that the Jews have any right for such a claim. King David was a stranger to Jerusalem. Of course the Jews cannot make any bigger claim than that of David, as Jerusalem was David's city. When a part of Jerusalem was under the Jews then. I noticed that the major part of the city was denoted as non-Jewish quarter. No single Jew was living in this area, this part of Jerusalem has fallen under the jurisdiction of Jordan.

My going to Jerusalem was under difficult circumstances. I waited to get a direct taxi to Jerusalem, However my inability to express my desire in their language caused inconvenience. The people did not understand the meaning of the word Jerusalem. When I said "Jerusalem," some understood it to be Aleppo, and still others as Beyrouth! A Travel Agent, who pretended to have understood my real destination, i. e. Jerusalem, asked me to wait in his place. I waited four hours ("for ages," as my English friends say). When I realised that all taxi cars to Jerusalem had already left, my human frailty persuaded me to express my anger to the man who made me wait for four hours giving me hope to be able to travel the very same day. However, as I had learnt very well the meaning of the biblical saying "the wrath of God does not do the righteousness of God.", I left them with a smile. By the Grace of God, I was fortunate enough in catching a taxi to Amman which saved me from the trouble of returning to my hotel in Damascus.

When our taxi car reached the Syrian border, I handed over my passport to the driver. He collected the passports of all the travellers and went to the officials there. The passports were checked very minutely by the Jordanian officials and then they allowed us to proceed. Then the driver showed the signs of great relief from all the difficulties of Passport Control. He decided to have a non-stop drive to the capital city of Jordan.

The driver handed back to the passengers their passports, as he did not need them any more. I looked at the driver in surprise. He did not have my passport. It had vanished. He could not talk with me as he did

know English. We decided to return. It was impossible for me to proceed without passport.

Who was this Jonah? Yes! I was a bit worried. While nearing the city of Rome, my suitcase had been stolen, still my passport was not lost. Now nearing the holy city of Jerusalem, I lost that too. Of course the loss of a passport is more disastrous than my first loss.

As I did not know the language, I kept quiet. The driver enquired in the cars that passed by whether they had received any passport of an Indian. Having not found one, we returned to the office on the Syrian border and the passport was found in the place where the driver had left it.

When we returned successfully, the Syrian and Jordanian guards wondered how this Indian had escaped their attention and entered the Jordanian territory without a passport.

Thank God, by evening our taxi reached Amman. But there is a difference of an hour between the time of these two countries. I adjusted my time. I was told that the taxi would not leave Amman in the evening to go to Jerusalem. After some difficulty I managed to get a taxi which helped me to reach Jerusalem by 9 p.m. the same day.

It was a splendid sight. On the way we saw the city of Jericho fully lit. I thought that we had reached Jerusalem. But I understood that it was only Jericho. Next sight was more attractive. It was the real Jerusalem. I am grateful to the Principal of St. George College, in Jerusalem who had made arrangements for my stay. St. George's College is a theological College for the Church of England (I mean,

the world wide Anglican Communion). This College takes students from various countries where the Church of England has spread. It is about 122 years since the Church of England established its ecclesiastical colonialism in Jerusalem. I was happy to see an Arab Bishop of the Anglican Church who was the Bishop of Jordan & Syria. He lives in the premises of St. George's College. The Archbishop of Jerusalem, an English man, was also living in the same place, where they have a good Cathedral. The Archbishop of Jerusalem was well acquainted with the Church of the East. There is a St. George's School attached to the College, Cathedral etc. I was told that Lady Rowena, the Patriarch's sister was a teacher in the school.

Next day I walked alone through the streets of Jerusalem walking from the St. George's College I passed the beautiful Y.M.C.A. building, Jerusalem Hotel etc and reached a place where it was written "Garden Tomb". This tomb, discovered by General Gordon, is believed by some people to be the real place of the burial of our Lord. But I saw nobody going in, nor knocking at the closed door of the building. The majority of the people believe that the traditional tomb found in the Church of Holy Sepulchre is the real place of the burial of our Lord.

I walked to the Church of Holy Sepulchre. I do not know the way. Yet I walked through the streets and saw a big gate. I entered through that gate which is known as the "Damascus Gate," to see the city inside the City Wall. I walked straight. Many "guides" came to help me, realising that I was a stranger in their place. As I heard that it was too expensive to get the help of

Be just for one person, I decided to visit all the holy places without the help of guides.

As I was walking straight, one boy, realising that I had lost the way, asked me to take a turn to left to the holy places of the Christians. He warned that I could reach only the holy place of Muslims, if I continued to walk in that direction. I thought he was right. But I hesitated to listen to him, fearing that he would demand remuneration for serving as my guide! So I walked a little more distance and took a turn and reached the area. I could not see the Church of Holy Sepulchre. I could see only one new big church. After seeing that new Church, probably a Protestant Church, I saw people coming out of a small gate. It also was a Church.

## THE CHURCH OF HOLY SEPULCHRE

I saw some tourists coming in and going out. There was a door. But as a whole it did not look like an entrance. Moreover some repair work was going on near this door. I asked a priest who, perhaps, did not understand my question as he was a Greek. However I imagined that it was the main entrance. I went in. I walked here and there. It was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre! I did not understand the history and importance of each and every historical place in that great Church.

There were some "guides" explaining to their clients. But I did not think it proper to join them. On their part, the "guides" are very particular to speak in a low voice. This was not due to any consideration for other worshippers, but in order that nobody other than their clients should get the benefit of their lectures.

The unemployed guides were waiting there for the chance of seeing a newcomer. These people will not hesitate even to offer free service to the visitors. Because they are sure that they will be rewarded for their work by their clients after hearing the excellent well studied lectures given by these guides. I suspect that they exaggerate the stories concerning the importance of each and every nook and corner of this church to make it more impressive and edifying. The ordinary professional guide will make more lengthy speeches about the shrines, more money is given as the remuneration.

The "priest-guides," I am sure, are doing this work not for remuneration, but for the edification and spiritual growth of the worshippers, who are coming as pilgrims from distant lands. My guide during my second visit to this Church was an Ethiopian priest who did an excellent service without any remuneration. As a whole with fairness, I must state that most of the guides (professionals as well as others) are doing a good job in carrying on good religious propaganda. These guides are not like the lecturers in some of our educational institutions, who are unable to give a lecture on their subject if they have forgotten to bring their notes with them! These "guides" were lecturing without any notes.

I made three visits to the Church of Holy Sepulchre on three different days. I am not describing them in detail. I shall combine the highlights of my three visits in one description. If my readers wish to follow me to the Church of Sepulchre, they will see the following things. At the very outset I must state that this Church has the tomb of Christ in one part and the actual site of crucifixion, i. e. Calvary in another part. It was a new discovery

me when I realised that the tomb was close to the Cross. John 19:42 clearly bears testimony to the fact that the tomb is near to the Cross.

As soon as I entered through the main door I saw some staircases on the right. I went up. That was an altar. People were silent. During my first trip I did not realise the greatness of that shrine. During my second visit the Ethiopian priest, who was acting as my guide, explained to me, it was the place where our Lord was crucified. It was on the hill of Calvary, i. e. Golgotha, the place of skull. Of course the original Cross is missing, The tradition says that after the discovery of the cross by Queen Helena, it was divided and distributed to the important centres of Christendom. No doubt, Vatican must have a portion, as it claims to be in possession of a good collection of Christian relics. One piece of that wooden cross is kept inside a cross which is kept locked in the side room of the actual site of Crucifixion. However a hole is there in the ground which is still believed to be the actual site of the original wooden cross on which our Lord was crucified for the salvation of mankind.

I understand that the main shrine belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek Church seems to dominate in the Church of Holy Sepulchre. It seems that they have shown real "crusading spirit" in acquiring a good number of shrines in the Holy City. The Greek Orthodox, the Roman Catholic and the Armenian are the denominations that gain a lot if they pay the guard's fee every day. If they fail to pay the fee the Muhammadan guard will not open the door of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. So this Church will miss a lot of money that

is to fall in their collection plates on that day. Hence, I should assume that this fee is always paid by these three denominations very regularly as "cheerful givers".

On the right side of the main altar, I saw another beautiful altar with images. It was easy to identify it as the Roman Catholic altar. The Romans, perhaps frustrated by losing the chance to erect the altar on the actual spot of Crucifixion, made the altar next to it. According to my opinion, the Roman altar has been more beautifully decorated than the Greek one with candles and lanterns. I heard from an educated priest in Jerusalem, perhaps with a little bit of oriental exaggeration, that there always existed competition between those denominations i.e. the Greeks and the Romans. The monks of each denomination kept a careful watch over the number of candles on the altar of the other denomination so that they can increase their number of candles and their decoration and thereby retain their superiority!

Just below the altar of Crucifixion there is a small place known as the "Chapel of Adam." The tradition says, our Ethiopian friend narrated, that there was the skull of Adam at the bottom of the cross. When the blood of Christ fell on the skull, it resurrected. So an altar was erected at that place of the skull, i.e. at the foot of the Cross. Sin came to this world by the disobedience of Adam. So by the blood shed at the cross of Calvary by the second Adam, (i.e. Christ) mankind is redeemed from the clutches of sin and darkness. I felt the importance of the place where I was standing. Behind the altar, the rent rock was seen. The rent rock has been preserved by covering it with a glass screen.



Coming out of the sanctuary of Adam I saw a place similar to the tomb. It was not decorated. However some people knelt there and kissed the floor. At first I thought that it was the tomb of Christ. Later I understood that it was the place where the body of Christ was first laid after taking it from the cross. This was the place where the body was wrapped in linen cloth along with the spices brought by Nicodemus. This was done in accordance with the custom of the Jews (Read John 19:39, 40).

Our next stop was at the real tomb of our Lord. The small room, where the tomb is, can accommodate only four persons at a time. I stood there meditating and knelt there praying. A strange feeling of inspiration and devotion had taken hold of me. I had reached the most important place of my pilgrimage—the place of Resurrection of our Lord. I could not imagine the strange experience felt by the first disciples and women who witnessed that “Empty Tomb” from which our Lord had risen. I wish I could stay here long. But more worshippers were waiting outside and it was my duty to give them room. I looked at the three crosses on the tomb, representing the three major denominations in that Church. The Greek Cross has the central place.

As soon as I come out of the small room, I was greeted by a Coptic priest. He opened his small gate and took me in. There was a small altar. He spoke to me something. I smiled just to give an indication that I was unable to talk with him due to the language barrier. Below the altar there was an empty place. He showed signs to stretch my hand through that space, and touch the rock. I did not realise the importance of that rock. Then I knew that it was significant act as I was touching the real rock of the tomb of

our Lord, which was on the other side of the wall. I cannot but appreciate the wisdom of the Egyptian who devised this "tunnel system" to touch rock of the tomb of the Lord without entering the room through the proper entrance.

In the dark room next to it, I walked very carefully without falling into the graves. I was advised to use a candle. I saw some Syriac words written near an altar which looked like a deserted shrine. It belongs to the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church. As the Jacobites have the Church of St. Mark they are not using this altar regularly. However it is occasionally used. The significance of this small chapel is due to the graves that are found there where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were buried.

I passed by another chapel where about twenty Roman Catholic monks were spending their time in silent meditation. Then I reached a place where some staircases were going down to a dark room. I went down. During my first visit, I was afraid to stay there long as I was alone. But during my second visit my friend explained that occasional services are held even in the dark chapel.

"That altar was ours" said the Ethiopian pariest pointing to neighbouring altar, while we were coming out of the chapel Queen Helena. He narrated the history of how this Ethiopian shrine came under the possession of the Armenians. At any rate the Ethiopians are not willing to admit defeat. The black Ethiopian monks who are living on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are a curiosity to the visitors, but an act of faith and zeal to those who are claiming to be, though in a small measure, the custodians of the burial palace of our Lord.

At last we came near the chapel of the Greeks which is known as the Catholicon. One tradition claims that the exact centre of the world is inside the chapel. We wished to see the alleged centre of the world! But the Muslim guard, whose family has a hereditary right over this Church, prohibited our going in, as they were repairing a part of the Church. After seeing all the parts of this Church, I regretted in my mind that I could not see any relic belonging to our Church. In 1830 A. D. there were Victorians there. It is a pity that the historical evidences are not available to support this view.

## THE SHRINES IN THE HOLY CITY

After the strange and blessed experience inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, I walked into the road showing the comparatively few visitors who were there that day. This street is called the 'Christian Street.' We have to bear in mind that Jerusalem is a city under Muslim rule. The majority are Muslims. So this street called the Christian Street has its real meaning. We can see Christians living in that part of the city.

A young man in the Christian Street invited me to his shop. I was shown around his shop of souvenirs. But most of them were images, photos, rosary etc. I wished to see crosses. So he showed me the crucifixes nicely made. I had to tell him that our church does not advocate idol worship. Therefore it prohibits the use of images, crucifixes etc. Finally I had to be satisfied with a small plain wooden cross made out of olive.

I cannot forget another evening in the other part of the Christian Street. When I was returning from the

Church of St. Mark a young man in the street greeted me. When he showed a familiar face I paused for a moment. He spoke to me in English and took me to the neighbouring shop. It was his shop. He offered to give me the things there on loan. As I did not have much money with me I tried to avoid him. I explained to him my position that I had lost my suitcase in Rome etc. and I was not in a position to spend money in buying more articles. When he realised that I was escaping from there, he invited me to have coffee with him. He reminded me of Arabian hospitality which he claims to be far superior to others. As a tourist, I had to bow myself in front of the national customs and behaviour. He knew very well that if I accepted his hospitality, I would feel obliged to him and hence there would be good business for him. He was right. After I had bought some crosses and candles I offered to give my address to him. However he did not let me do that. He showed over-confidence in all clergymen and especially in me and repeated his hope that my money would reach him by Money Order from somebody whose name he did not wish to know. With the characteristic skill of a businessman, he escorted me to the front door and kissed my hand as a mark of respect and bade me farewell. I said to myself "a good businessman, indeed".

## ROMAN PRAETORIUM

On the other side of the city inside the wall, I could see the place where Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate. Many people were waiting in the drawing room of the Convent where there is the Roman pavement of very large flat stones in the court of Tower of Antonia. It is known as the 'Lithostroton,' and it has been identified as the Roman Praetorium where Jesus was tried before Pontius

ce. I noticed a tank which the soldiers used to fill water for the use of the household of Pilate.

Through the dark entrances of the palace of Pilate, which is now underground, I walked from one room to the other. My guide explained to me about the importance of the place where I was standing. He explained to me that it was the original floor and the bricks were the original ones. We reached near a place where the floor was covered with a carpet. The large bricks showed the markings of games played by the Roman soldiers stationed at the press Antoina. Perhaps the soldiers cast lots for the robe of Jesus at this very place.

### PRISON OF CHRIST

From the Tower of Antonia, I went to a building occupied by the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek priest answered the door bell. He opened the door and let us in. He took me to the chapel downstairs to see the prison of Jesus. I saw the place where Jesus was chained to a wall through a hole in it. Next to it, to my surprise, I noticed a place something like a pit where it was written "the son of Barabas". I guessed that his prison must have been very deep because otherwise the prisoner would escape from there. When we went up, the priest left near us the collection plates where some bank notes were displayed, thereby giving us the indication that we were supposed to give a similar amount. I put some coins, but perhaps it was not enough to satisfy the expectations of this priest.

### POOL CALLED BETHESDA

From the prison of Christ, I walked into a church near which is under the Roman Catholics. Near the church

same excavations were going on under the French archaeologists. They have unearthed a Church which is built in three layers signifying the three different periods in which it was built. It was explained to me that this church was built three times as it had been destroyed repeatedly by enemies. The interesting thing I observed was that whenever this Church was rebuilt, it was built over the old destroyed one. The most exciting moment was when I was told that this church was built on the pool called Bethesda recorded in the 5th chapter of St. John's Gospel. I realised the importance of the place from ancient times. It was being cemented for the first time. I went down the ladder. The floor was not dry, as the cement was only newly put. I stood there, where there was no water. The water had been removed for the purpose of cementing and it was to be poured back and to be preserved forever. I imagined for a moment the time when the angel of the Lord used to come down to this pool to heal the sick. I wished I had the angel come down to the pool at that moment. Then I would have received blessing as I was the only person in the pool at the moment.

#### THE PLACE OF PETER'S DENIAL

I saw a Church in the name of Peter. When I enquired of this big Church I understood that it was the place where Peter denied our Lord thrice. It is known also as the Church where the cock crowed. When I see this Church it reminds me always how we are tempted to deny our Lord in spite of the constant warnings against it.

#### ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

I walked out of the city area through the small gate facing the Mount of Olives. I saw a small Church.

understood that it was a living monument to the martyrdom suffered by the first martyr of the Christian Church. In the place where Stephen was stoned to death outside the city wall. The sight of this beautiful little Church makes every Christian pilgrim to take a new decision to suffer for Christ.

## GARDEN OF GETHESEMANE

From the Church of St. Stephen it was easy to reach the Garden of Gethesemane. I saw three places belonging to three different denominations. The lowest belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church. The middle one is of the Church of the Roman Catholics. The Upper garden is known as the Russian garden. Each one claimed to possess the actual site where our Lord prayed just before he was betrayed.

The Greek Orthodox area has a big Church, which I understand, is used by both Greeks and Armenians. I walked in through the main door. But it was dark inside. When some women came and began to light some candles, I was happy to have some light. Immediately they asked for permission to close the door as the wind was putting out the candles they were lighting. Again we were in the dark, except for the dim light of the candles, with which they were decorating the steps. My friend and I went down. On our side I saw an altar dedicated to the memory of the parents of Virgin Mary, i. e. Anne and Jonachar. At the bottom of this church, I looked for a small tomb, which is believed to be the tomb of Virgin Mary. In the dark I saw a tomb. Of course all the Churches do not believe that this tomb is here. But the Greek believe this tradition to add to the importance of this Church.

In the Roman Catholic garden of Gathesemane, I felt that it was the real site of the garden. The Church is a beautiful one. There is an old Olive tree believed to be over 2000 years old. As a whole I felt that the garden is a dry place and did not show up green trees as I expected. Just above it was the Russian garden of Gethsemane which contained taller trees than in the other two gardens.

### THE CHURCH OF ST. MARK

In the city of Jerusalem, near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, I saw the name board of the Assyrian Church. I was delighted to read the words Assyrian hoping that there would be something of our own. But I soon discovered that it was the Church of St. Mark belonging to the West Syrians i. e. Jacobite Christians. Anyhow I went in to see this Church. Of course it is difficult for me to forget the difficulties I had to reach this Church. It is not situated in the main road. Actually I entered through the back side of some houses and did not know how to proceed, as there was no further road. The children came around me and tried on me their knowledge of English, and I did not understand them. I wished to get out of the place. But I did not wish to return the same way fearing that the man, whose service I denied, would laugh at my helplessness. I was overconfident. That was the reason why I had denied his offer to lead me to the Church. Finally I took two of these children as my "guides." I was not at all confident that they were taking me to the right place. But they did. I was right in the Church of St. Mark. These children opened the Syriac books and gave me to read. Later I went up. There is a small monastery where the Metropolitan of Jerusalem is residing. The Metropolitan was away and I was received



by a priest who could speak English. He entertained me with their usual hospitality giving strong Arabian coffee. He invited me to stay there. Some young people are living there, as inmates of the monastery. The importance of this Church of St. Mark is that it is believed to be the place of the Last Supper and the place of the first Eucharist.

## TO BETHLEHEM

"Where is the bus to Bethlehem?" was my question as soon as I reached the Bus stand in Jerusalem. My English friend had some difficulties with his camera. I could not help him as I was not an expert in photography. So he decided to stop at Jerusalem to repair it, and join me at Bethlehem. My Pakistani friend and I started our bus journey to Bethlehem.

As soon as we got out of the city boundary we happened to see the nice chapel dedicated to St. Stephen the place of his martyrdom, about which I have already written. At the next turning of the bus nobody can miss the sight of the Mount of Olives. Before reaching the top of this small Mount known as the Mount of Olives I was able to see some other interesting sights. The Mount of Olives is only a hill separated from the city by the Kidron Valley.

## THE LAMENT OF OUR LORD

The bus stopped. When we climbed this hill along a very bad road we happened to find a newly constructed church. There was pin-drop silence in the surroundings. The Church was open. But nobody was in. I wished to find out the significance of that place. "Is it a deserted church?" was my question. My friend knew nothing more than me. There were no guides. A fine contrast with

## *100 Strange But True*

the Church of the Holy Sepulchre! As the Church was new I guessed that there should have been some recent discovery at that spot. My friend had a book with him and I began to search for some details concerning that church. I sat on a bench facing the beautiful well-built city of Jerusalem, and read about the significance of that place. It was at that place that our Lord sat facing the city of "Jerusalem" and lamented for it. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own breed under wings and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34) Sitting there, facing the city, I began to think about us. How would the Lord cry for the modern cities?

### THE CHURCH OF THE PATER NOSTER

When I walked out of this church I saw tombs near the gate. They date back to the old Testament times. Then I reached another church a little above this one. It is called the Pater Noster. The site is traditionally believed to be the place where Our Lord delivered His great eschatological address (Mark 13:3) As the tradition grew stronger, now it is believed to be the place where our Lord taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer. This may be a doubtful tradition to some of us. Anyhow it adds to the importance of the Mount of Olives. As a result there is an increase in the number of pilgrims to this part.

The nuns who are living there are the guides of this sacred place. The Lord's Prayer has been inscribed in many different languages on the walls of this Church

So I hastened to read the first one to know the language in which it is written. To my satisfaction, I found that it was Aramaic. As a member of the Church of the East which is holding fast to the language of Jesus, I was proud to see it having the first place. I do not know what some of my Protestant friends who attach undue importance to Greek would think when they see Aramaic having the first place in this church! The only Indian language, I saw, was Sanskrit. The dozens of the languages of the world in which the Lord's prayer is inscribed is a real challenge to the pilgrims who come from different parts of the world. This also indicates the widespread growth of Christianity. A pilgrim gets the wider vision of word Evangelism.

### THE MOSQUE OF ASCENSION

At the top of the Mount of Olives I saw something like a small chapel. It is known as the Mosque of Ascension. It is believed to be the place from where our Lord ascended to heaven. That the ascension took place from the summit of the Mount of Olives is not necessarily implied in the Acts. 1:12, and it appears to be excluded by Luke 24:50, for Bethany lies at the back of the hill and almost a mile from the top. But since Constantine erected the Basilica of the Ascension on the spot marked by a certain sacred cave, the site of the ascension has been placed here and marked by a succession of Churches. In the Mosque of Ascension I saw a footprint, which is believed to be the footprint of our Lord. This is also the place where Omar the King encamped when Jerusalem surrendered to the Muslims.

### BETHPHAGE

From the top of the Mount of Olives I looked to have a good look at the Holy City. The various signs brought

to our memory the stories we had read in Old and New Testaments. Very near to the place where I was standing I saw the little village called Bethphage. It was the place from where our Lord started the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Every year the Christians take a procession from Bethphage to Jerusalem, with palm leaves in their hands to commemorate the first Palm Sunday. I walked down from the Mosque of Ascension to reach this historic village of Bethphage. When I came down and reached near the village I did not find anything of importance. Of course, there is no crowd here, except on Palm Sunday.

## BETHANY

When we continued the journey along this way to Bethlehem I saw on my left the little village of Bethany on the Eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, at a height of 2208 feet above the sea. There was the residence of Lazarus and his sisters, a favourite retreat of the Saviour, and the scene not only of his greatest miracle but also of his ascension according to some. From the 4th century down to the Mohamedan invasion several ecclesiastical buildings had been erected on the spot, but of these no distinct traces remain. This place has not yet attained much importance. Even the sepulchre of Lazarus and the houses of Mary and Martha and of Simon the Leper are not viewed to be the real sites by many people. On the way to Bethlehem the tourist or the pilgrim cannot miss the sight where the early monks lived. But it is also probable that these were the caves where the lepers used to live as they were refused permission to enter within the city walls.

## RACHAEL'S TOMB

Leaving Bethany our bus travelled through the hills to the little town of Bethlehem. As there is no direct road we had to travel more than eleven miles. But it is only six miles as the crow flies from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Our bus had to pass through the border of the country of Jordan. So our bus was stopped on the way and checked by the guards for arms. There on the right is a big tomb, like a small chapel known as "Rachel's Tomb." Near there happened to pass by some charitable institutions which are run by nuns and other Christians. I was happy to find out that the Holy Land is caring for the sick and the suffering. After seeing Rachel's Tomb, I thought that I was nearing Bethlehem.

## THREE CONVENTS

This Church of the Nativity which is a noble basilica, was originally built by Queen Helena. It is surrounded by the three convents successively created by the Greek, Latin and Armenian Churches. All these monks are praying and doing service in this Church of the Nativity. But to our shame, we Christians should be aware of the fact that quarrels have taken place there between the monks of rival denominations. I had read in the newspapers that at the previous Christians there was some quarrel between the monks belonging to the Roman Catholic Church and Greek Orthodox Church. They threw wine bottles at one another. Finally Mohamedan police had to intervene to keep law and order among the followers of Christ! I said to myself "What a shame!".

## FIELD OF THE SHEPHERDS

Inside the Church there were some things of antique importance like the floor which is kept under lock in the police custody and the old baptismal font used in the early centuries. When I came out of the Church I saw a board showing the way to the field of the shepherds who had the unique privilege of hearing the glad tidings which the angels proclaimed at the time of the birth of Jesus. When I left Bethlehem I was thinking about the peace that was brought to this world by the Son of God.

## JOURNEY THROUGH THE EAST

After visiting the Holy Land I returned to Damascus the second time. I hoped that I was going to get a chance of visiting the members of our mother Church in Northern Syria. I took a taxi from Damascus to Aleppo. It was a good sight to look to the deserts on both sides of the road and then to see villages in a distant place. The whole village was so small and I was wondering how people in that area manage to enter their houses. It was a complete surprise for me to see such and walled huts, a fine contrast to the sights of London and Paris.

It was late when I reached Aleppo. I tried to find conveyance to my destination in Khabour area. Also I needed permission from the Security police. The authorities in Aleppo expressed their inability to grant me permission to travel to the Assyrian villages saying that it was a special zone and foreigners are not allowed to travel there without special permission. With great regret I decided to agree to their suggestion to take the train from Aleppo to Iraq through Turkey.

I had imagined that I was free to visit these places as I had the advantage of being a student. I was gathering courage to go to my destination in Syria without any special permission. I had a passport and a transit visa; that was all what I needed. Further I was venturing to take the undue advantage of their ignorance of English language. Most of the police who checked my passport did not know even to read my name. Then how could they talk to me? So nobody would object me from entering any part of the Syrian Arab Republic. In spite of love for adventure I finally decided not to take that risk as I was already tired. Moreover I had to write my articles for the "Voice of the East" and two days rest at Aleppo was a most welcome suggestion.

As there were only two trains from Aleppo in a week, I had to wait for two days. After finishing my writing work, I went to Aleppo Railway Station to leave Syria. I cannot forget the difficulties I had to suffer to get a ticket. I joined the crowd to buy a ticket. After a long time I managed to stretch my hand to the window and buy the ticket. After buying the ticket I had to make way to get it. I was hurrying up thinking that the train was about to arrive. But later I understood that the incoming train was running in the opposite direction. I have witnessed much bigger crowds in the underground Railway station in London during the rush hours every morning and evening. Yet I have not seen any confusion prevailing there as was found in this unruly crowd at Aleppo Railway Station.

It was a two day train journey from Syria to Iraq through the Turkish territory. We were travelling through the border. On one side I was seeing the Syrian flag

and on the other side I could see the Turkish flag. One Syrian friend who could speak a few words in English spoke to me about the enmity existing between these two countries. I was afraid when I was told that sometimes there will be bombs on the railway line put by the Turks to kill their Syrian coins. I cannot describe how grateful I felt when one Turkish boy gave me butter milk to drink and was willing to accept my Syrian money. Some Muslim friends gave me watermelon and other things to eat. I had heard about Arab hospitality and I had that experience too. I did not know their language to express my gratitude in a better language. So I said "Shukran" by which I meant "Thank You" in their Arab language.

A very inspiring stop was at Nussybin in the Turkish territory. When we stopped there for two hours I was looking back to the period of history when this town which was called Nisibis was spreading divine knowledge to other parts of the world. As I have dedicated my life to the progress of our church and her restoration to her ancient glory I was thinking about those good old days when Mar Barsoma and Mar Narsai took lead to establish a theological College at Nisibis. Many scholars came out of Nisibis. The famous interpretation of the Holy Qurbana (Eucharist) written by Mar Narsai is still a precious work for all the members of the Church of the East. From Nusaybin I could see also the Syrian village Khamishli across the border. This village was only one mile far and I wished to visit our Church there and meet the Archdeacon there. But passport formalities would not permit my walking across the border. Still in spirit I was with them. Passport regulations cannot control our thoughts.

When I reached Mosul it was 4 a. m. on a Sunday. Nobody was waiting for me. I managed to get a lift to



hotel with the help of an interpreter. As there was no room in the hotel I had to find a place on the floor where I felt comfortable after the tedious journey of two days in third class railway compartment where the common people were travelling and could not speak English language. It was very kind of a Muslim young man travelling in the second class compartment to come occasionally to greet me as he knew that nobody in my compartment could speak with me. He very politely asked me whether I could change to the second class. My reply to him was the same as that of Mahatma Gandhi the father of our nation who replied "I am travelling third class, because there is no fourth class."

On Sunday morning my first attempt was to find my host, Deacon G. S. Benjamin. I had only his office address, which was about fifty miles far from the city of Mosul. I had thought that it was within walking distance. So I asked the people on the way and began to walk to this office at a place called Ain Zala. The people who were guiding me never understood where I was going. The people in the market places were staring at the stranger who was walking dressed in a black cassock and a dog collar (Dog collar means the collar worn by the clergy. I do not know why English people call clergyman's collar by that name) After walking some time I reached a river bank. I did not know what it was. Later I understood that it was Nineveh, the place where prophet Jona was sent to preach the destruction of that important city. Nineveh has been destroyed and discovered by archaeologists in the last century. The Assyrian race became a well known people only after the discovery of Nineveh by the British people.

I was disappointed. I was not sure that I was going to get the opportunity to participate in a communion service. Still I was fasting. I was thirsty. I thought that I was to see somebody within the next few minutes. Yet I could not find anybody. I was praying that I might see some Christian who could speak English. Later I went to a bank and began to talk to one man there. He did not know anything. I asked him to direct me to any Syrian Church whether Jacobite or Chaldean. Then one man who was working there stood up and introduced himself as a deacon of our Church. He was very happy to see a list of addresses of our bishops and Metropolitans whom I was planning to visit. He immediately contacted Deacon Benjamin over the telephone. How happy he was to hear that I had arrived safe and regretted that he was not able to meet me at the railway station. He was thinking that I was arriving by plane. He was also enquiring for me. It was really a happy meeting because he was meeting a deacon of our Church in India after twenty nine years. When he left India in 1933, he had trained five persons for clergyhood spending about four and a half years in India. He remembers some words of our language.

The town of Mosul was a great centre of our church. But in the later days it came under the influence of the Chaldean Patriarch. The famous monastery of Rabban Hormizd is very near to Mosul. The prayer book called Khudra was written there. Many monks were engaged in the copying of Manuscripts. But today Mosul has got only a small community of our Church. We have one Church which had been served for many years by late Kasha Yosip Kellaitha who distinguished himself as a good

her and printer. Many of our service books were printed in Mosul. But today people may say that Nestorian community in Mosul is an insignificant one. But the burial grounds of Mosul are replete with the bones of faithful members of our Church.

My most generous host Deacon Giwargis Benjamin is planning to take me to Kirkuk to meet his relatives and other members of our Church. Kirkuk has a bigger Church with the name of Mar Geevargis and it has the largest community next to Bagdad in Iraq. I was longing to go to Kirkuk. But we had to take permission from the security police before proceeding to Kirkuk. After making necessary arrangements I was not granted a permit to go to Kirkuk. I was having only a transit visa for seven days. The chief of the security police asked me to proceed to Bagdad directly without stopping at Kirkuk. I am very sorry to miss this opportunity. Yet I was happy that I was going to visit the important centre of our Church.

### SHORT STAY BAGDAD

After spending one complete night in train I arrived at Bagdad International Railway station. I was taken from the station by one of the relatives of Deacon Benjamin Mar Zaiya Cathedral where Kasha Kaku Lazer is the priest. He was extremely delighted to receive this unexpected guest; I was a most welcome guest at his house. How happy we were to be able to meet after five years! How proud he was to see his former student in a clergyman's dress! I was on my part happy to see my former teacher as a priest with a beard. He has a good

house in the Church premises with all the necessary conveniences. This is the only parsonage of our church I have visited where there is electric fan, refrigerator, telephone and a personal library of some useful books in English, Syriac and Arabic. This is similar to what I saw in parsonages in England.

Mar Zaiya Cathedral is the biggest Church we have. It has two three-storeyed towers. So it can be seen from a distance. It is bigger in size than the Patriarchal Church of the Roman Catholic Chaldean Patriarch who is now residing in Bagdad. The inside of the Church is furnished with branches as in the western Churches. The beautiful altar is fitting to the dignity of the church. As we look up from the altar it looks like the blue sky with many silver stars. Also a cross of stars shines on the eastern side. The altar has two episcopal thrones with canopies covered with red velvet. Usually this Church has the presence of Mar Sargis Episcopa who is the bishop of Bagdad. Occasionally it is blessed to have the presence of the Metropolitan Mar Yosip Khannishu who is now living in Bagdad and likely to stay there for a long time. Inside the Church was hanging a replica of the famous Chinese inscription of the Nestorian monument set up in 781 A.D. It was brought as a precious treasure from the Mar Zaiya Church in Jelu when it was plundered by Kurds in 1915 during the First World War.

My stay in Bagdad was short. But it was a very useful time indeed. I knew that Bagdad has become a stronghold of the Assyrians. The faithful members of the Church of the East were living in Tercey and Persia upto the first World War. But after 1918 they were left with

choice but to escape to the Refugee Camp at Baquba Bagdad. Thank God now the situation is better. Now the people who lived in the Refugee Camp at Baquba are living at various places. Many of them or their children can be found in the busy cities of U. S. A and the U. K. To-day a good number of these people are living in the city of Bagdad. They could not go to Syria or Lebanon as many of their brethren have done. The people who are in Bagdad belong to different walks of life. There are the rich as well as the poor.

Mar Zaiya Cathedral, is a huge Church. But there are about fifteen thousand people in that city belonging to our Church of the East. So there are two other Churches also in Bagdad. One is in an area called Dora. There is a nice chapel in the name of Mar Geevarghese. There is also a very enthusiastic Vicar by name Kashaq. He is teaching Syriac language to our children so they get a good opportunity of hearing their parents speak Syriac language at home. But in the schools they do not hear that language, as Arabic is the national language. The old Syriac is almost dead for long and is always spoken by the Assyrians. I found a land adjacent to this chapel where they were going to build a good Church.

There was not enough time to reach the Railway Station to leave Bagdad for Basrah. The funeral service of the mother of Bishop Mar Esho Sargis was over. It is our custom to say "Shlama" (peace) to the relatives of the deceased. Along with others I said "Shlama" to the Bishop Mar Sargis and his father. Before the congregation finished saying peace, I began to say "Push Bashlama"

(Remain in peace) to those who were present in the cemetery. Following the custom of kissing the hands of the priests, I did so after bidding good bye to the three prelates. Kissing on my head returning the greetings they blessed me, wishing all the best wishes for the journey. They regretted that they could not accord me a grand reception " that would never be forgotten during my lifetime".

I wished to get a car to take me to the station in time to catch the train. A relative of late Mar Thimotheus Metropolitan offered to take me in his car. Meanwhile another member of Church took me and drove off to the station. Before I reached the station, the train was in. I rushed to a compartment. My friend, Lazar, a Medical student in a college at Bagdad found me a compartment, where some Pakistani friends were travelling, having just enough place for me to sit down. I thanked him for everything and said good bye. I had planned to leave seat. I looked up and saw enough place vacant. It was not wide enough for anybody to occupy. I was looking for some place where I could stretch my legs. It did not matter that it was too narrow and I would have to lie down on my side.

As the train was running through dusty ground, the dust was going into my nose and eyes, as the windows were not shut. Whenever I shut the windows, the one next to me opened it. I could neither complain nor request him as I did not know his language. It was not possible to save myself from the dust.

This train did not have any first class or second class. It had only third class compartments. It meant

At the train was carrying only the toiling masses. With much delay, I was forced to put my plan into action and managed to climb to the rack for luggage and slept there. When the ticket examiner came next morning, he woke me up. I jumped down from the luggage rack and was called "Englishmen" as Englishmen, who are fond of abbreviations, call me. Once I was shocked when an Englishman asked me where my "lug" was. Could not he see my legs? Was he blind or was he blind?) The other passengers in that compartment spoke something in Arabic. I hoped that they were not scolding me. They were saying "Abuna" meaning "father." The people who ventured to build the Tower of Babel never knew that the confusion of languages was going to be a serious problem which posterity would be helpless in finding a solution. After checking the ticket I gladly handed over my passport when it was asked for. But he could not read English and could not determine whether my passport was genuine or not. I could only sympathise with him in his helplessness.

I was in a dilemma when I reached Basrah station. I was wondering how I was going to face the language problem again. How will I succeed in reaching the Church to meet the Vicar whom I never knew before. I walked out of the train with my luggage, which was more reduced than when I set out on my journey, due to the "friendly" behaviour of the Italian who was good enough to steal one of my suit cases to reduce my burden which I was carrying with much difficulty.

At a distance was standing a young priest clad in white robes with black beard. I thought in my mind "how nice it would be if he was the vicar of our Church whom I was

to meet ' When I went near, he smiled at me. I wonder whether he had seen me anywhere. How did he hear about my arrival? (By revelation!) I asked "Are you not Kas Yonen?" He took me to his house, which was attached to the Church building.

Two days later, after passport formalities, I was able to embark the ship to Bombay. Six days later I landed my homeland.



## CLERGYMAN, TEACHER AND STUDENT

I spent the four years after my return from England in different capacities. The first year from 1962 to 63 was spent as an assistant in the Big Church. During that year on sundays I translated the speeches of Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan. Some of my time during the week was taken for drafting and typing letters for the Metropolitan.

I also wrote articles and promoted the publication of the *Voice of the East* magazine. Since the editor was a writer, I had to write under various names in addition to my real name. I also started writing women's column under a pen name. But I nursed a fear that the people would look down on me if they had detected that I was substituting for women. My honest intention was to challenge women who wrote only rarely.

That year I was very busy. Although it took only a few minutes to go home on my bicycle I did not go home. The food was brought from home to the Church thrice a day. Sometimes I found time to go home once a week.

But in some weeks that too was not possible. Organizations outside the Church such as the Y. M. C. A, the Y. W. C. A., etc invited me to speak. My responsibilities began to increase. The Metropolitan needed me to do his office work too.

In 1963 the priest in charge of the Seminary went to Bangalore to study for B. D. degree. I was appointed the head of the Seminary. There were six students one of whom was attending College. I had to teach them Syriac. Also I had to help them in their lessons in College and High Schools.

In addition to teaching I took interest in the total development of the Seminary. I planted teak trees. Arrangement was made to fence the 52 acre land which never had any fencing upto that time.

It was exciting to learn the preliminary lessons of agriculture. I began to learn about cashew trees growth in abundance in the 52 acre Seminary estate. My friends were mainly rural people. They were happy that an England-educated person like me was willing to listen to those farmers some of whom had never gone to school.

As a matter of fact they knew many things about agriculture which I did not know. If they were literate, it would have been much better to work with hands. What rural India needs today is both education and willingness to work with hands.

The Seminary is six miles from Trichur. I had to come to Trichur at least twice a week to continue the

Up I was giving for the publication of the *Voice of the East* magazine. Every Sunday I had to be in Trichur to translate the sermons of the Metropolitan. Therefore in many ways the year in the Seminary was busier than the previous one.

The team spirit of the students helped me to lessen the burden of my responsibility as the head of an institution. The students were about 15 or 16 years old and I was only 23. So I was almost like a brother to them and not like a father. They were not frightened of me. The discipline perhaps was less tight. However, everybody was scared of the Metropolitan who was a strict disciplinarian.

The co-operation of the students was so great that they used to listen carefully to the noise of trespassers cutting firewood and run to the compound to catch a poor person who was cutting the branches of the cashew trees. One of the students who was good at catching the offenders listened to the noise with rapt attention. In several cases I had to let the offenders go away with a warning. What action can we take against a poor person whose evening meal would not be cooked if we refused such minor concessions

My knowledge of Syriac language was limited. Since there was no other teacher I had to learn it and then teach it. I did the teaching and reading reasonably well. As there was the problem of teaching the students tunes of Syriac songs. I taught them the tunes I knew. As I am a born non-singer my voice was bad. The students reasonably requested me not to sing aloud fearing that the cattles grazing in the compound would run berserk.

An important event that took place during my teaching career in the Seminary was the split in the Church. On one day in January 1964 I visited the Metropolitan. He had received a letter of suspension from the Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun. The Metropolitan did not show any signs of worry on his face.

When the Press reporters rushed to him that evening when the news leaked out from his enemies, the Metropolitan refused to comment on the reported news. Thus the painful conclusion of several years of conflict through correspondence reached its inevitable climax.

Personally, I was very sorry that the much feared suspension letter arrived, at last. Many people thought that I would join hands with the opposition. My family was related to the lay leader of the other party. But I remained loyal to the Metropolitan who had ordained me.

Out of the six students I was teaching in the Seminary, three came from the families of the other party. But the youngsters did waver. They stood firm with me until I left Trichur a few months later. Then they joined the other party and even now serve that party.

Almost all the sermons of the Metropolitan in these days were translated by me, from English to Malayalam. I did not add to, or subtract from, what was uttered by the Metropolitan. Nobody could find fault with my loyalty to my mentor and spiritual father. But many, and I suspect that the Metropolitan too, had doubts about my loyalty. Some kept a close watch on my movements. The Metropolitan used to ask me whether my contacts with the lay leader of other party was

through telephone. I smiled. I was not bothered, as I did not have any secret deal with the opposite group.

The Metropolitan insisted that I should go to the United Theological College, Bangalore for doing Master of Theology degree. I was not all keen on going to Bangalore. I wanted to go to America. One advantage of going over to America was to complete a Master's degree in one year; or eight months to be precise. In India the minimum is two years.

Not only saving one year but also getting the facilities of better libraries and more qualified professors was the advantage I counted in favour of going abroad. But when I had asked for permission to go to the U. S. A. in the previous year the Metropolitan did not grant permission on the pretext that I was urgently needed in Trichur. I suspected that a fear was lurking in his mind that I would side with the Patriarch if I went to the U. S. A where the Patriarch was residing.

Reluctantly I decided to go to Bangalore. One of my colleagues, the Rev. P. K. Varghese, was already undergoing his Bachelor of Divinity studies in the United Theological College, Bangalore. Hence I enjoyed the company in the hostel.

I was only 24 when I commenced my Master of Theology studies. I was the only M. Th. student residing in the campus. There was another student Peter Jones who was teaching in the Southern Asia Bible Institute in Bangalore. He was staying outside the campus. He was the only student in the theology department. I was in the Church History department.

Although I had weighed 130 pounds while studying in England, my weight had been reduced to 125 pounds since my return from England. Soon after I had joined the College the senior students began to ask newcomers whether they belonged to the first year B.D. or pre-theology which is a preliminary year for non-graduates. When I told the senior students that I was not in B. D. I class they asked me whether I was doing Pre-Theology. It embarrassed them when they learned later that this young lean boy had already passed B. D before they wrote even entrance examination for the B. D course.

Being the only M. Th. student in the campus it gave me some recognition and concession. There is a custom to throw water on the new students in the hostel by the senior boys. It is the ragging in vogue for many years in that hostel. The senior students brought water in balloons and buckets and knocked at the doors of the newcomers. When they opened the doors water was poured over them. I went out of my room to escape it. When the ragging was almost over I slipped into my room suddenly and slept.

When ragging was over my bragging began. Next morning everybody went to the chapel for morning prayers. A tall senior student from Mangalore, Prakash Samartha, was the ring leader of the ragging. In my foolishness I boasted when he came near me that nobody could throw even a drop of water on me the previous night. In a friendly way he told me: "Achen, it was not your merit; we just decided to let you escape." After the prayers I repeated my challenge.

The consequence was immediate. Mr. Samartha and friends carried me away. Then a naughty idea struck me

I kept quiet in the arms of my senior B. D. friends. When they drooped me in the water tank, both my hands worked fast in splashing water on all friends who had come to enjoy seeing me drenched in water. They all ran away. Although my cassock was wet, I had the wrong satisfaction that the clothes of my friends also got wet. Needless to say that I learned a lesson not to boast to the point of offending others. Then wet spectators also learned a lesson not to rejoice unduly at the expense of others.

The two years I spent in Bangalore were very profitable for scholarly pursuits. I concentrated in Church history. In my first year the professor Dr. Kaaj Baago was away on his furlough in his home country in Denmark. Therefore it gave me more time and more responsibility to study on my own. During my second year Professor Baago was back. He looked at the draft of my thesis. One day he frankly stated that my English sounded like Victorian language. He enquired whether I was reading mostly Church history books written in the last century. Nevertheless, he corrected my language and my thesis was typed before December 5. I do not know of any M. Th. student who has completed his thesis before January.

I am also a last minute student. My thesis is the only exception. Since I was fascinated by the Christological controversy of the fifth century, I took pains to complete it earlier than the due date, Dr. K. Bago was happy about the thesis and recommended it for publication, after the comments from the external examiner Dr. V. C. Samuel of Adis Ababa, had come. I hesitated to publish it then. Because I was a young man. Moreover I wanted to improve on that thesis. But now in 1978 I published it as it is, after getting permission from the Senate of Serampore.

The attack of Pakistan over the Kashmir area was an important event of that time. I was asked by the principal Dr. Russel Chandran to preside over the meeting of the staff and students. Various new opinions were expressed. Some foreigners felt that we should not just side with India alone. Instead we should pass resolutions sympathizing with the wounded soldiers on both sides.

Although Indians were willing to show sympathy to both the wounded soldiers and bereaved families on both sides they demanded that we should march in procession to the grounds where a support meeting for the Indian government was being organized. The next day I marched in the front of the procession with a big banner of the United Theological College to the grounds where the support meeting was arranged to be held. Before the march began, the ceasefire was announced over radio. Still we patriotic Indians marched. Many took note of a bearded clergymen robed in the clerical garb leading a public march through the streets. When I visited an Indian friend Dr. Abraham Thomas in Boston in 1977, he recalled his Bangalore days and particularly my leading the public march.

An important religious event that happened during my studies in Bangalore was my ordination to full priesthood. When I came home for my summer vacation of 1965 Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan called me to his room and enquired when I would complete 25 years of age. I said "June 13" He looked at the calendar and was happy to learn that it was the day of Pentecost that year. Every year it changes because Pentecost festival is observed only on Sundays. If 13th was a Sunday a particular year, then it would be Monday the next year.



Further, it depends on the Easter. But the date of the Easter changes according to the lunar month of the Julian calendar. The Easter has to be on April 25 in order to get the Pentecost on June 13. The previous occasion when the Easter and the Pentecost fell on those dates was in 1954, eleven years earlier, It was going to be the same, eleven years later in 1976.

Since the day of Pentecost was the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus Christ, it was considered an auspicious day for ordination to priesthood. The Metropolitan immediately fixed June 13 as the day of ordination for me and some of my colleagues. Four priests, one deacon and three sub deacons were ordained on that day.

The completion of my 25th year was significant. Less than two years ago when an orientation was conducted at the same Big Church the Metropolitan told me that he intended to make 25 the minimum age for priesthood. I was not interested in promotion. Still he announced this new regulation. There was need for a priest in the Seminary and in my parish where I was in charge at that time. But it was the time when some of my friends ("God save me from my friends" prayed somebody somewhere!) were propagating that my loyalty was to the group opposed to the Metropolitan.

As a matter of fact I had decided not to accept any posts higher than that of a deacon when I dedicated my life for the service of the Church at the young age of fourteen. What attracted me was the life of Mar Aprem the Syrian saint who died in 373 A.D. He remained a

deacon till his death - still he accomplished greater things in social as well as literary fields. He was any ideal.

But in June 1965 there was a challenge for me. The Church was almost divided after the suspension affair of January 1964. My services were badly needed for the Church which was facing a shortage of clergy as four priests had formed the rival group. Should my asceticism stand against the needs of the Church? Finally I consented.

The day before my ordination, I shaved for good. Now my beard is more than fourteen years old. Although the deacons are allowed to shave, a clergyman raised to the rank of a full priest is required to keep a beard. Growing a beard was a sign of asceticism. But now Hollywood stars and Oxford Professors have earned some mark of respectability for the beard, although the Hippies have devalued the acceptability of the beard.

My ordination on 13th June 1965 had some legal complications. It was the first ordination Mar Thoma Darmo was conducting after he had received suspension order from Patriarch Mar Shimun in January 1964. Therefore some people sought for a court order restraining the Metropolitan from ordaining anybody.

On 12th June the subordinate Judge of Trichur passed his order rejecting the request for injunction particularly because all arrangements for the following day had already been made. An appeal on that main suit known as the suspension case is still pending in the Supreme Court, in Delhi, although the High Court of Kerala had decreed that the suspension is null and void.

As the injunction sought was rejected there were strong rumours that the candidates would be kidnapped, on the

way to the Church. During the previous ordination in October 1963 many had obstructed the Metropolitan from entering the Church. Even the police had advised the Metropolitan to postpone the religious ceremony to avoid clash. But the Metropolitan waited and waited and finally conducted the ordination as his rivals shouted protests and the police struggled to keep law and order near the Holy altar.

I wanted to avoid kidnapping. Even Martin Luther, the great reformer in Germany in the 16th century, was kidnapped not by his enemies but by his friends. That alone assured his safety. I used to go by my bicycle to the Big Church by 9 p. m. after supper. Usually there would be nobody on the road except some drunkards who frequented the toddy shop at one end of the road where our home is situated. So I began to think of getting to the Church before it was dark.

At about 4 p.m. a car to our home. The visitors were two magistrates, both husband and wife. As they were leaving I requested them to take me in their car to the Big Church. What more protection could I expect than the escort of two magistrates. As they dropped me in the Big Church, I felt safe. I did not go home to eat supper that night. That was too risky.

During my second year at the United Theological College, I had to spend more time for my studies for the examination. I spent the first semester for completing the thesis and since January I concentrated on the six examinations that I was to take in April. Since I was the only student for M. Th. in Church History I had the assurance that I would be the first in the University in the

final examination! I read the question paper of all the three previous examinations held by Serampore University in 1952, 1962 and 1964 and prepared model answers.

As the examination drew near I had to give up my favourite "Chinese Checkers" game which I used to play occasionally despite the discouragement from my friends who were aware that my play was "sound and fury signifying nothing."

Ring tennis was my favourite game. I competed during College sports. As I won the first prize in Jabalpur some years earlier, I was able to win in Bangalore too. Students requested me to play for the mixed doubles in the same game. As a celibate priest I hesitated for a moment. Then I agreed to play. My partner was a girl from Nagaland. We won the first prize

In 1975 we met at the assembly of the National Christian Council held in Nagpur. I could not recognize her, as she had changed her name after her marriage. She is now Mrs. Tanuja, Principal of a mission School in her hill state. I told her that there was a student from her area Miss Leno Iralu who played ring tennis with me. I asked her whether she knew her. She smiled. Yes, she knew her quite well ever since she was born. Then I realised that she was the person I was talking to. We both had changed considerably within one decade.

In addition to my studies I did the revision of the English translation of our liturgy. It had once been translated from Syriac to English and published by the S. P. C. K. in 1893. Then it went out of print. We persuaded the publishers to undertake a reprint. They were reluctant as

There was not much demand for such a liturgical work. Hence Mar Thoma Darmo made a new translation with the help of the Rev. Francis Mannookadan. I undertook to give an Oxford touch to that translation with the help of the Rev. David Wilcox who was the professor of liturgy at the U. T. College, Bangalore.

English he knew as an Englishman and an Oxford graduate. But Syriac was foreign to him. I had to read to him each and every line. When the meaning was not clear, he suggested changes after hearing from me various shades of meaning of the Syriac original used in the liturgy. I took the Syriac-English dictionary of J. Payne Smith and read to him the various meanings given in that dictionary. It was a difficult task as my knowledge of Syriac too was much limited. When I went in 1977 to his home in England, he told me that he had regretted that we could not do a better job with that translation.

During my studies I did my share of responsibility towards my Church. There were only a few of our members scattered in different areas in Bangalore city. We conducted communion service every month in the United Mission High School in the city. On the other Sundays we visited the homes of our Church members and conducted prayer meetings.

"Can't you see the sign board? God has given you eyes. Then why do you break the rules?" demanded a police inspector as I was rushing on my bicycle to a prayer meeting in a one way road. It was a Sunday morning. There was not much traffic. And I was under the impression that one way traffic regulations applied to motor cars, buses etc and not to bicycles. I immediately

got down from my bicycle and explained to him that in my home town Trichur one way regulations did not apply to the bicycles. He was not satisfied with my explanation. He blamed me for violating traffic rules. Since I am a Keralite I did not know the local language in Bangalore. Still I thought of softening the Inspector by saying that his boss, Police Commissioner Chandy, a Christian from Kerala was known to me. Even without that the Inspector let me go without delaying me further as I told him that I was already late for a prayer meeting.

The three Churches (Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Church of South India, and Orthodox Syrian Church) who had their regular services in Malayalam for the immigrants from Kerala invited me to preach occasionally which I readily accepted. It was a good ecumenical experience to spend two years in Bangalore.

The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (C. I. S. R. S.) the Student Christian Movement (S. C. M) the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Whitefield Bangalore and the YMCA training College for training YMCA secretaries all over India etc added to the various dimensions of this ecumenical experience.

As for my studies, I had to write five final examinations each of four hours. To write for four hours at a stretch was a difficult task. So far, I had written exams of three hours duration. I took model exams. There were five questions to answer in four hours. Like talking my writing also is quick. In four hours I tried to write what one could do only by four and a half hours. My overspeed did not give me any additional grades, since I

must have definitely omitted some words while writing in a hurry. Moreover my handwriting is poor. Still by the grace of God I was able to get good grades.

My inadequacy to sing well made me not to join the English choir in Bangalore. But one day Mrs. Pape, an English lady, announced that the College choir desperately needed some more new voices. I decided to walk into the chapel at the appointed time. I did not anticipate the inevitable question "what parts do you sing?" To me, who knows practically nothing about different parts in Western music, it was a difficult question to answer. I replied that I used to sing "*alto*" in Jabalpur. The experienced choir director who must have instantly sensed my unsuitability to "*alto*" section suggested that I should sing *tenor*. To me it was so easy to change from *alto* to *tenor*, as long as I did not know the difference!

## TWO YEARS IN AMERICA

Before I was due to complete my studies for M. Th. degree in Bangalore, the Metropolitan asked me to try to get admission in America for further studies. Two other priests studying for the final year of the Divinity (B. D.) course had already begun correspondence with Seminaries in America for their studies at the Master's level. Since the Metropolitan had not sanctioned my request to go to America three years before, I decided not to try again. But this time it was his turn to persuade me to go to America. I wrote and got a scholarship in the Union Theological Seminary, New York.

The scholarship in New York was something like 2500 dollars, just enough at that time for my studies for an academic year of eight months. It did not include travel expenses. Therefore I wrote to the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U. S. A. to grant me a travel grant. They hesitated to help.

I applied for Fullbright` Scholarship for travel grant to go to the U. S. A. Although Fullbright scholaships are



usually given to non theological subjects, there was no such stipulation in the rules governing that scholarship programme. The only condition was that the candidate must have a second class (B grade) in both Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Since I fulfilled those academic conditions I applied for it. Fortunately it was a surprise to me. I considered it a privilege to have been selected for this scholarship award. Hence, elated and excited, I wrote a letter to the scholarship secretary of the Episcopal Church in New York stating that I did not need their help as I was already selected by the Fullbright scholarship authority. The Rev. Dr. Claude Pickens who was happy to know that I would not trouble him any more, wrote a nice reply with the usual courteous words of formality. "Do not hesitate to write to us when you require our help in future."

A few days later I heard from the Delhi headquarters of Fullbright scholarship Programme that there was to be final selection at Delhi from the candidates chosen in the regional centres. My name was not in that final list. One reason for this I could guess. They had asked me in Madras regarding the usefulness of my study for my future work in India. I had replied that I was likely to be appointed to teach in the theological Seminary of our Church. In reply to another question I had announced that there were only six students in our Seminary. Delhi committee might have felt that it was not a priority to teach Church history to six students when other Indians could utilise their training in the U. S. A. for thousands of villagers in India in the fields of Engineering or agriculture.

Immediately I wrote to the scholarship secretary of the Episcopal Church that I needed their help for travel grant

as my name was not included in the final list of the Fullbright scholars. Then the Episcopal Church authorities had no other alternative but to keep their promise. Without further correspondence they sent me an air ticket.

That was my first opportunity to fly. Upto that time I had not travelled in an aeroplane in India or in my trip abroad. Now I flew from Cochin to New York. During my transit in Bombay I conducted a communion service on Sunday morning. There had been no religious service of our Church conducted in Bombay since my return to India from England in 1962. The members of our Church in Bombay were extremely happy that they were able to participate in communion service after four years.

On Sunday itself I flew from Bombay. The Trans World Airlines which had issued my ticket was on strike. So TWA passengers were allowed to Rome by Alitalia. When we reached Rome we were allowed to stay there for the night. Next morning they asked us whether we wanted to go to the city of Rome. First, I said "no" as we had only 7 with us. Later I said that I would like to go for a few hours and I would take the afternoon flight to London. But the authorities stated that they had loaded my luggage in the morning flight and advised me to take that flight to London. And I did. Upon arrival in London, I was told that my luggage was booked by the afternoon flight. I had to wait there any way; since my brother-in-law Dr. N. V. George had gone to work in the hospital when I telephoned my sister. After a few hours of waiting my sister and brother - in - law came to the airport and a couple of hours later my luggage also arrived from Rome.

Ten days of stay in England helped me to renew my acquaintances. I visited my old seminary at Warminster.

It was my privilege to visit the Lambeth Palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury. My old friend Canon John Satterthwaite (now Bishop) was delighted to see me again. I gave house baptism to the son and the twin daughter of my sister. My preference was to conduct a regular baptism. But the only deacon in England Deacon Bawai, nephew of Mar Yousip Khananishu Metropolitan, belonged to the opposite party in our Church. So I did not conduct any religious service. Still at an Assyrian picnic I was able to meet many old and new friends. It was a pleasure to visit the home of another old Assyrian friend Mr. Aprim U. de. Kelaita.

The devaluation of the Indian rupee created problems for me at the London airport. When I wanted to proceed on my journey to New York the man at the check-in counter informed me that I had to pay some extra money in order to travel. A dollar was equivalent to 4.75 rupees. I tried to explain to the man that my ticket was bought in dollars. And the dollar was not devalued. His confusion was worse confounded, considering the fact that the ticket was issued in India, although the payment had been made in New York.

My argument did not penetrate his head. Then I said even if he was right insisting that I should pay the extra money, only New York people who had bought the ticket should pay and not I. Even if I had to pay there was no cash with me as only 7 dollars was the amount allowed to each passenger on the travel. Since reservation for me had been made on that plane, my right to travel could not be denied. Moreover they should have warned me before my leaving Bombay and not on the way. He was not

convinced of my arguments. Then I had to threaten him. As the plane was about to take off, I demanded that he pay for my hotel expense, if he delayed my journey. I argued that since the Rev. Cherian Thomas who was travelling with me on a similar ticket had already got into the plane I had equal right with him. But the man at the counter was not amenable to reason. He insisted that owing to the devaluation of Indian rupee, I was to pay a big compensatory sum in order to be able to travel to New York. I demanded to see his boss, I wanted to complain to the Manager. Then some other staff members interfered and I was allowed to rush to the waiting plane into which my fellow passengers had already boarded.

When the plane touched the Kennedy International airport in New York a few hours after our supper, we discovered to our surprise that it was only 4 p. m. or so in New York. When I came out of the immigration and customs halls, Dr. Pickens, the scholarship secretary, received me. There was a bearded priest with him. That was a Mar Thoma priest from Kerala, the Rev. P. T. Joseph (now Bishop Joseph Mar Irenaeus). He informed me that we had to go for a Kerala supper that evening in New York a few hours later. I said that my supper was already over a couple of hours earlier. Yes, I gained about five and a half hours that afternoon since my departure from London.

The first three days were arranged as orientation programme for the newcomers by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. There were students from all over the world. We enjoyed our stay in New York. Our accommodation was arranged at the General Theological Seminary, the largest theological seminary of that religious denomination

in America. We were given opportunity to see New York city as well as the United Nations. We met a young diplomat in the Indian delegation. If my memory fail not after 15 years, his name was Ramesh Arora. It was a privilege to be in the United Nations building which can be described as the world's capital. It was an attractive sight to see, the multicoloured flags of the different nations fluttering on this building.

I went to Michigan by bus. It was my first journey inside America. My sister whose home I was going to had shifted her residence. Her new address was not known to me. I reached the bus stand at a town near Mount Pleasant where I had to change the bus.

I began to speculate how I might find my sister among the thousands of residents of that University city. It was no joke. I telephoned to the University where my brother-in law taught Economics. They informed me that they did not have his current address as he had vacated his residence prior to the summer vacation. I did not know anybody there. There was no extra money beyond a few dollars and this would not be sufficient to afford stay in a hotel.

Then I saw a man hitting his wife. Both were drunk. They were returning after the burial of the mother of the husband. They quarrelled at the bus stand. The husband hit his wife on her mouth. A little blood came from her mouth. She noticed my presence nearby. As I was wearing a clerical robe she felt some help was available. She challenged him to hit her once again. The husband did not care to. He just left the scene. She looked at me pleading for help. I asked her what she wanted. She said that she wanted to reach home and she did not have

any money to purchase the bus ticket. I went to the counter enquiring how much it cost to buy her a ticket. The cashier was watching the unfortunate affair. He told me not to bother. He was sure that the husband would not desert his wife instantly. He told me that when the effect of the liquor goes down, both would find some compromise. Therefore I returned to the old woman and enquired whether she had any relative in that town. She gave me a phone number where they had come for the funeral of her mother-in-law. When I rang up hoping that I would be able to report to somebody regarding the ill treatment of this old woman by her husband, a man took the receiver at the other hand and said "hello." It was her husband himself! He was waiting hoping that somebody or his wife herself would telephone there as she had no money to take the bus ride to their home town. When I talked to him, he asked me to send her to him in a taxi. I did accordingly.

When I returned to the counter again to report to the man the result of my mission, I noticed a little note addressed to me in my sister's handwriting. I asked the man at the counter what was that note. He casually remarked that it was left by an Indian family who had come there that morning and returned after a long time. When I explained to him that it was addressed to me, he handed it over to me and knew that my sister's family was staying at Worl's Motel at Mount Pleasant. I was glad that my attempt to help the old woman was rewarded by my locating my sister. I immediately bought a ticket to Mount Pleasant. From the bus stand I telephoned to the Motel and finally I was able to join them in the Motel.

My one week stay in the Motel was an interesting experience to me. As soon as I reached home my sister saw my beard and inferred that I must have forgotten to take my shaving kit when I left India. She asked her husband to rush to the market immediately and buy a shaving set before I finished my bath. Then my brother-in-law had to remind her that I had been promoted as a full priest after she had left India and my beard was more than one year old and I was having it as it was obligatory for priests to keep a beard.

During my stay there she taught me how to cook Indian food as I might need to know it during my stay in America. It really helped me later when I invited my American friends occasionally to cook Indian food. We looked at the advertisements in the newspaper for a house. Some owners did not want non-white people to rent their houses and so gave some excuses. Finally we found a house. But the landlady wanted to know how many were going to occupy that house just my sister and her husband and their son, or, my brother Jose and myself also along with them. When we explained that my brother was going to study in Detroit and I was going to study in New York the land lady agreed to rent her house. How difficult it is to get a house on rent for non-white people and people with larger families. The owners are worried whether the house would be kept clean if people with large families occupied it.

During shopping in Mount Pleasant many people looked at our strange dress. My sister was wearing a saree and I was in my clerical garb. I should not find fault with them for paying attention to our dress. Because an American in most of the Indian towns and villages attracts

similar attention. Especially if he has a camera, as most of American tourists have, many children often in villages would gather around for the honour of being photographed.

Union Theological Seminary at New York is an inter-denominational Seminary. It is the largest Seminary with the co-operating support of several Christian denominations. We were about six hundred students. Several of us came from many countries of the world. The fellowship was cordial. The scholarship was superb. Many scholars of international repute were teaching there. Mr. M.M. Thomas from India was a visiting Professor at the Seminary during that year. Students referred to him as Dr. Thomas or Professor Thomas or the Rev. Thomas and he explained that he was none of these. He was simply Mr. Thomas. Since then three universities conferred honorary doctorate degrees on him, which he well deserved.

Books were plenty in our library. In addition to half a million books in the library of the Seminary we were entitled to read four million books kept in the Columbia University Library. I went there to look at the books not because I had finished reading half a million books in the Seminary, but just because I wished to get a glance at a library where four million books were available. Columbia University was close to the Union Theological Seminary in the same street, i. e. Broadway. There is a Ph D. programme in religion jointly sponsored by the Columbia University and the Union Theological Seminary.

Foreign students at Union had a separate social gathering. I was one of the four Indian students in that institution. I was asked to speak on that occasion. I just shared some of the exciting and amusing experiences



in that strange country. Many laughed. They thought that some were just exaggerations. But I could vouch for their veracity.

Christmas Fireside is a Christmas party of the Seminary community. Professors and students joined in it with their families. It was organized by the School of Sacred Music in the Seminary. A lady professor, wife of the late founder of the School of Sacred Music, invited me to sing at the Christmas Fireside. I told her about my past poor record in singing.

"I heard you talking at the foreign students gathering. If you can talk you can sing too," argued the determined music professor. "Singing is much different from talking" was my sincere reply. She promised to send one of her best students to accompany my singing with a piano. When the student heard my singing, he suggested that my singing would not suit a piano, as I had changed the pitch after every rhythm. He brought a Chinese drum and tried to give rhythm to my singing. That student, who was studying for his Master of Music degree, miserably failed to match the drum beat (according) to the everchanging tone of my so-called singing. "You better sing without any accompaniment" opined my confused instrumentalist.

Without disappointment to myself I sang at the final performance. Since my talking had captured the admiration of the music professor I decided to talk before singing. I explained to the enlightened audience that I was singing in five Indian languages. It was a Christmas song of five stanzas of two lines each. Since each language was different, no musician was capable of accompanying me. I started with Malayalam and ended up in Hindi

with Tamil, Telugu and Oriya in between. I also told the audience my strange but true record in singing in *alto* in Jabalpur and singing *bass* in England and *tenor* in Bangalore, and, now offered to sing *suprano* in New York. When the audience burst into laughter I told them that it was too easy for me to do so, as I did not understand the actual difference between these four parts. When some laughed at me others laughed with me.

Mrs. M. M. Thomas, wife of the visiting professor, who herself was a professor of science in Trivandrum' came to me and remarked that all the five languages sounded somewhat the same and I was just fooling the Americans who did not know any Indian language. I explained to her that many words in Tamil and Telugu sounded like Malayalam, being South Indian languages and several words in a Christmas song like Jesus Christ, Bethlehem, Jerusalem etc were pronounced in a similar way even in the North Indian languages.

The lady professor of music who invited me to participate in the performance was not totally disappointed. What they needed was entertainment rather than scientific singing. She presented me with an English hymn book with musical notations as a token of her appreciation of my participation in that happy and joyous occasion. She thanked me profusely. It is not an expression of hypocrisy but a genuine appreciation in certain circles in America today for any innovation. Many conventions are broken. Strange ideas find acceptance among many enlightened persons in the highly sophisticated society in the West.

*Grain of Salt* is a publication of the Seminary community. It is like a newsletter. I wrote down my 'strange but true,

experiences in New York which I shared at the foreign students gathering referred to earlier. American students also were interested in hearing them. Hence I wrote it down entitled "A Stranger's Diary." It was published in the front page of *Grain of Salt*. Some of those experiences are recorded in the following pages of this book.

Learning English was made compulsory to all non-Americans except the students from England. It is not offered in the Seminary, but in the Riverside Church, next door. It is conducted once a week by volunteers who wanted to help the foreign students who could not converse fluently in English. I went there. My teacher asked me for how many years I had learned this language. I answered: "Ten years in school, two years in College and seven years in theological Seminaries, making total of nineteen." I explained to him that out of these, six years were outside Kerala and one year in England itself. The tutor responded by saying that he had only sixteen years to his credit, i.e. three years less than mine and therefore would prefer not to teach me. But I explained to him that since they had no volunteer who had more than 19 years of formal training in English I would request him to teach me. Perhaps we could talk for an hour. He could suggest improvements and also correct what I wrote as I had an urge to be a successful writer. Moreover I enjoyed the privilege of going up in the elevator to the 10th floor of the Riverside Church buildings for which they normally charge an outsider but offer it free to the students learning English. Whenever we went up we enjoyed a panoramic view of New York city.

Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the greatest men living in the world at that time. A Negro clergyman, he

worked for the civil rights of his people. As he was coming to New York to submit a memorandum to the United Nations, a public meeting was arranged for him to speak at the Riverside Church, a huge Church built by the gifts of the late John D. Rockefeller. As the seats were already sold out I began to speculate how to find admission to the building at the time this powerful preacher was speaking. I did not have English class on that day. Finally I got in as an usher to seat visitors. It was to me a memorable experience to see him speak. His moving body began to sweat when his earnest words of conviction, some contrary to the policy of the administrations of President Johnson, began to flow incessantly from his mouth.

Later I walked a few yards behind the procession in the Central Park when he marched to the United Nations to submit a memorandum pleading for putting an end to the Vietnam war etc. I was questioned by some secret police regarding my interest in the protest march. Since I was on an Indian visa in America, I explained to them that I did not take any active part in American politics.

Once I was invited to attend a dinner given in honour of Bishop Mar Dinkha of Teheran, Iran. It was arranged in YWCA in Yonkers. I went to Yonkers. I could see only the name board of the YMCA. I asked a taxi driver to show me the YWCA. He queried "the YW or the YM?". I replied "YWCA." The confused driver looked at my beard and commented "You need a shave up there!"

While studying in New York as a "Missionary Fellow" was classified in the official records as Miss Fellow for

breivity. I protested against it and asked them to put a period after Miss. Then every body would know that it was an abbreviation and would not cast any doubt on my masculinity.

An Indian friend told me that the White American Press and public have made it appear that the Negroes are school drop-outs and criminals. When a Negro kills a white man the newspapers give prominence to that news. On the contrary, several white men are committing criminal offences on the blacks. Such atrocities are not properly reported.

Indians, as a whole, are treated well by the white people in America. Although the Indians sometimes blame the white population in America for not treating their black brethren with human dignity, we Indians cannot be acquitted of the same charge. Because many of us Indians residing in America like to mingle only with white people and worship in pre-dominantly white Churches. In India too, many of us are guilty of caste prejudices.

New York city consists of five boroughs namely, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Richmond or Staten Island, and Bronx. The first four boroughs are islands and interconnected with many bridges. Manhattan is the main city area of the New York city. It was bought from a red Indian, Peter Minuit in exchange for merchandise worth 4 dollars in 1626.

In Haarlem area in uptown Manhattan there are more Negroes. There had been racial riots in Haarlem area when I was studying in New York. We used to walk down to Haarlem area and many of the students of the Union

Theological Seminary opened bank accounts there to help the black men. Moreover we had decided to boycott the big banks which had invested money in Rhodesia and other places in favour of the white minority. When I used to go to Harlem I was often faced with some curious questions. "Are you a Moslem?" "Are you a Pakistani?"

Walking through Harlem area in New York city one Negro boy followed me and kept on repeating: "I will show you the barber shop." I was not going for a hair cut and therefore I did not understand the reason for the voluntary services of this boy to show me the barber shop. Later I realised that the boy was teasing me about my beard!

Because of my beard some asked me whether I was a Muslim Mullah. Once a reformed Jewish Rabbi in the U.S.A. introduced me as an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi from India! A "Black power" man began to talk to me as if I was his buddy.

The Hippies called me the *Guru* from India. When I told them that I was a Christian priest from India they said that they were disappointed since they had wanted to see me as a real *guru*. Some youngsters came and put flowers on my beard and called me flower child. Many hippies shook hands with me. I remember, however, the sincere remark of a small girl. "Mummy is he Jesus?" With my black beard and long robe I gave that impression to that child. How differently Americans thought of my beard Santa Claus, Black power, Hippie, or Jesus? And I was none of these!

Within three months of my stay in New York I noticed to my pleasant surprise that I weighed 165 lbs. That was

a sudden increase of 40 lbs within three months. It was a pleasant surprise to me because many people were blaming me that I did not carry the weight of a priest. But with added weight my physical appearance qualified me to be a leader. But it was the beginning of my physical trouble. The secret of sudden increase in weight, I suppose, was due to my eating ice cream and the lack of physical exercise which I had in plenty while riding on my bicycle, in India. For the last twelve years I have unsuccessfully tried to reduce my weight. It has only increased to 183.

Watching Television was my main pastime or recreation. Some of the programmes I watched were Tarzan, Daniel Boone, Mission Impossible etc. When other students of the Seminary occasionally saw me in the common room watching such programmes, they said that it was meant for children. The serious students came only to listen to the news bulletin of Huntley-Brittly as well as by Walter Cornkite. I explained to my friends that I did not watch Tarzan etc when I was a young boy. Hence I was making up for the lost opportunities.

During the summer vacations I went to summer camp near Seattle, Washington run by the United Church of Christ. I looked at a map to locate Seattle near Washington D. C. But I could not find it. Then I looked up in the map and found out that Seattle was in Washington state more than two thousand miles far. Then I took a bus to Michigan. After halting for a few days in my sister's house I took a train to Seattle through the rocky, mountains.

I was a World Friendship guest at the 13 weeks of camps at Pilgrim Firs in Port Orchard. We had to cross

the Puget Sound on a ferry. Since I was a man in uniform, I got 50% concession on the ferry ticket like the military men, nuns etc. Very few clergymen wear cassocks in America. But to me who was wearing the uniform I got the concession without any further identification.

During my three months stay at the Summer Camp I was invited to preach in various Churches on Sundays. On one such Sunday I preached in the Church of the Rev. Ralph Barber. After the service the Rev. Barber took me for a boat ride in Lake Washington. He owned a boat with all fittings. He used to spend his holiday for one or two weeks in that boat. His wife and daughter Cathy accompanied us. Cathy was the elder sister of Mary, who was the Life Guard in our Camp. I soon knew that Cathy was engaged to be married the following week.

While we were in deep waters Cathy who was sitting at one end of the boat made a shocking statement. "Daddy, I think I will ask George to marry me." I used to be called George, which was my first name. Embarrassed I was when I looked at the face of Ralph Barber. He was more embarrassed and shocked than I was. As a celibate priest I did not know whether it was a proposal or not. I would have jumped into Lake Washington, had I known how to swim! On second thoughts I realised that Cathy was asking me to marry her to her fiancé whom she was to marry within a few days. When I replied that it was the privilege of your father to marry you to your future husband, the tension was over. I blame the English language which uses the word marry in both senses.

Some boys once followed me and wanted some fun. They shouted "Santa Claus." I stopped and presented



them with a giant size smile and said "Ho! Ho! I am not Santa Claus. I have this black beard while Santa Claus has a white beard." One smart boy smiled and said "Don't worry. It will turn white when the snow comes." He was right.

In a church summer camp in Seattle some asked "Shall we touch and feel your beard?" Others wanted a souvenir of the camp. A hair from my beard which they pulled, (without any idea of my pain) and preserved it in an envelope! Some put curlers on my beard to see how it looks. Later they came and offered to apply some "curl-free" on my beard.

Some wanted to know what happens to my beard when I sleep. Does it lie flat? I could not give a scientific and accurate answer since I had never observed it carefully. I replied I never notice my beard when I sleep as my eyes are closed during my sleep. What happens when I take bath? Do I use a hair dryer? Do I comb it? Do I apply hair oil to groom it? Do I trim it? Does it hurt when it is pulled? That is a list of genuine doubts concerning my beard.

When I told them that I do not cut my beard, a boy once asked what happens when it grows and touches the ground. For the information of my readers I must mention that it does not grow that long. I do not know of anybody whose beard touches down to the ground. My beard is 16 years old. Fourteen years ago it looked somewhat the same size. The growth of beard is different from people to people.

At the Church Camp we used to sing  
"A million tomorrows will all pass away.  
'Till I forget all the joys, that were mine today".

Pilgrim Firs is a great asset for the Washington North Idaho Conference of the United Church of Christ. It serves the purpose of a great reservoir of spiritual strength and inspiration to adults and youngsters alike. We often talk about the generation gap. But at Pilgrim Firs, both the young and the old forget about their age. Even the ministers reaching retirement age played volleyball with equal, if not more, enthusiasm and energy than the 14-year-old boy playing in the opposite court. Pilgrim Firs also bridges the gulf between the ministers and the laity.

While leaving Pilgrim Firs with a truckload of college campers after the Labor Day weekend, "my heart was down and my head was turning around; not because I had to leave a little girl in Pilgrim Firs" but because I had to leave behind a lot of happy memories. I must declare that my heart was there though I have been from India to America.

Pilgrim Firs taught me many lessons apart from balancing spoons on my nose. I could observe and appreciate the activities of the dedicated Christians of this country. It was my first opportunity to live with the teenagers. I played as well as prayed with them. I wanted the campers to know that the adults had the patience to listen to the views of the youngsters and also to appreciate their wisdom. Many youngsters came to know that a priest like me, though wearing a cassock and beard, was, after all, a human being like them. The image of a minister "up there" in the pulpit was not the one which the campers at Pilgrim Firs have felt and experienced.

Most of the songs we sang around the campfire and at the dining tables were new to me. Nevertheless, I sang them as if they were very familiar to me. It was amusing as well as amazing to see the mothers and grandmothers at the Women's Camp singing many songs from the "Songs They Wouldn't Publish." They went on the "Buta" hunt with greater interest than their children and grandchildren who participated in other camps.

At this stage I have an honest confession to make. I used to laugh, with other boys, at the girls who shed tears on Saturday noons at the time of farewell. Though I thought of these tears as phony, now I know that they were genuine.

After the summer camps were over I went down to California. I stayed in San Francisco with Mr. Yuav Jacob, an Assyrian friend from Iraq. I travelled by bus to Turlock and was warmly received by Deacon Joash de Kelaita. He had fields full of watermelons and grapes. California is really a garden state with plenty of fruits. Several of Assyrians who came from Iran, Turkey, Syria etc became citizens in this area. They are good farmers and restaurant owners. Some of the present generation are degree holders and are in various professions.

I stayed with a celibate priest the Rev. Esho Sayyad. The old priest offered all his rare books to be placed in our Seminary in India. But I knew that it would cost a fortune to ship these books to India. Since neither of us had that much money I began to speculate how to get money. I persuaded my host to sell some of his books to pay for the shipping cost. The old priest who had invested all his savings to purchase these rare and valuable books on the

Assyrian Church and culture, refused to sell any of them. So they never reached India. The priest later presented them to the library in the college of that locality.

I took a bus ride from San Francisco to New York in a Greyhound bus. It cost 99 dollars and took three days and three nights to travel across the United States from San Francisco to New York. Since the roads are fine, the speed could be 70 miles per hour; it was not as tedious as it would have been on the Indian roads. Moreover the bus stopped for breakfast, lunch and supper at bus stations and passengers were given about an hour to walk around and breathe fresh air at every stop. Still, when I completed the journey I was extremely exhausted.

In September 1967 I joined the Princeton Theological Seminary to pursue doctoral studies in Church History. Princeton was about one hour bus ride from New York. The famous Princeton University was close to the campus of the Princeton Theological Seminary. I was allowed to take some courses at the University and the others at the Seminary. I took German, French, Latin, Early Church History etc in the University. It was a good contact with the Secular students in the University who normally keep out of Church circles.

I walked in the streets wearing my black cassock. Since I was the only one with black robe and black beard, everybody used to look at me. I stole the attention of each and every one who passed by. Later I began to suspect that some day the police would arrest me for public nuisance or for causing traffic accidents. The children used to look at me with amazement and amusement.

A little girl looked at my long skirt-like robe and made her innocent observation "Mummy, look! A girl." Somehow wisdom dawned in the head of that three year old when she looked at my beard and changed her mind "Mummy, no, boy." It really confused that little child again to look at my clothes and kept on shouting "Boy-girl!-boy-girl." Finally the mother interfered and with a sense of apology looked at me. I smiled and said "It does not matter. I am used to it". I could hear on another occasion a girl whispering to her father "Daddy, look, that man is wearing a long skirt!" The children I used to babysit asked "George! Are you a *real* babysitter." They never had a bearded baby sitter. "How did you get it. My daddy does not have that thing", said the little girl Margaret.

After my addressing a women's meeting in the U. S. A. once, somebody asked me about my beard and whether it was honourable to have a beard or whether I was a rebel. I wanted to defend my beard and to impress upon the American women the dignity of the beard in the Indian society. I hastened to make an unwanted remark: "The President of India has a beard, so have I." The women looked at each other in despair. They were confused. One woman who assumed that she knew more about India than any Indian challenged my statement. Women unite! She felt hurt at the very thought that my insinuation was that Mrs. Indira Gandhi had a beard. She stood up and with indignation and dismay asked "Are we talking about the same person?" Knowing about her honest mistake I repeated that Indian President had a beard. She again asserted her belief and declared that Mrs. Indira Gandhi did not have a beard. I explained that she was our Prime

Minister and the President was Dr. Zakir Hussain who grew a beard. All women were relieved at my clarification that Mrs. Gandhi did not have a beard. I suppose there was nobody from women's lib in that group. Otherwise they would have been happy if I said that Mrs. Gandhi had a beard!

Once a woman telephoned to the hostel and asked for a babysitter. I replied that no girls were available at that time in the Seminary. I promised to help provided her children would not object to my beard. She sounded excited and asked "what colour?" I replied "black beard.", She said, wonderful, the children "would love it." And they did!

During the Christmas season I was approached by the organizers of the Christmas function to sing some Indian songs. Although I was tempted to accept the offer, on second thoughts I decided not to do so. I told them that I could balance nine or eleven ordinary tea spoons on my face. They were fascinated by the idea. I began to practise and finally succeeded to increase the number of spoons to thirteen. I did not have any more room as some area of my face was occupied by my beard.

The master of Ceremonies introduced me as an Indian who could balance thirteen spoons. He compared my spoon balancing to the rope trick of the Indian snake charmers. To my surprise I had a full band set to play music and beat the drum after I put each spoon on my face. When the number reached eleventh and twelfth the beat became louder and I began to lose my control and two or three spoons fell on the ground. A professor who was standing near by took them and handed over to me. Without losing courage I placed them back on my face. After I placed the thirteenth spoon

on my face I walked to both sides. There was a thunderous applause from the audience. Even when I shook my head, all those thirteen spoons remained on my face as if they were pasted or fixed there. After the function was over President of the Princeton Theological Seminary Dr. James Mc Cord came forward and shook hands with me. About nine years later when I wrote to him about my impending visit to Princeton he wrote back asking whether there would be a repetition of my spoon balancing.

During the summer of 1968 the Indian Association of Princeton decided to stage a drama called 'Sacrifice' written by the late Rabindranath Tagore, the famous poet of India. The office bearers of the Indian Association under the leadership of Dr. Ramachandran, the President of the Association, began to persuade me to act as a priest in the play. Since I was a bearded priest they decided that I was the most suitable person for this character. I agreed after some hesitation. Later I realised that the priest has to appear on the stage without a shirt on, in the well known half naked dress of the late Mahatma Gandhi. I refused to do that. Moreover, I would have to wear a sacred thread usually worn by the Brahmins. Since I am a Christian priest I had my hesitation to appear on the stage in the dress of a Hindu priest.

They saw the point of my objection and relieved me from that responsibility. But it was only to give me a greater responsibility. I was compelled to be the King in the drama. They explained that my beard looked like a royal beard. The King's role was the main role in the drama. I had to learn quite a number of paragraphs by heart. But I did. Since I had a bent for acting in dramas when

I was young, I enjoyed this opportunity offered to me after several years. One of my Trichur friends joked that he was going to report the matter to Trichur to my bishop and people of my Church in Trichur. who would censor me for this. Since this friend did not carry out this threat, I am now revealing it. Drama is an art and need not necessarily be bad. But some people may abuse art. So is literature or a biography. One can throw mud at others while writing biographies.

In September 1968 I received a telegram from Bagdad. It was from my predecessor Mar Thoma Darmo. He wrote. "I am in Bagdad now. Expecting your arrival". It was both expected and unexpected. Mar Thoma Darmo had written to me that he was making preparations to go to Bagdad. But since he had no passport I was under the impression that he would not succeed. But he did. I had to pack up and go.

When I got the telegram to proceed to Bagdad I decided to obtain a visa to Iraq. I went to New York and searched for the Iraqi Consulate. Unfortunately there was no Consulate or Embassy of the Iraqi government in the U. S. A. as there was no diplomatic relation between these two countries. Then I approached the Iraqi Mission to the United Nations in New York. But U. N. missions have no consular sections to issue visa. They advised me to approach the Indian Embassy in Washington, D. C. as Indians had taken over the Embassy of Iraq there.

I travelled by bus from New York to Washington. Upon arrival in the Indian Embassy they directed me to the former Iraqi Embassy which has a name board, "Indian Embassy, Iraqi Interest Section." Actually only name board is different. Much of the rest of it including the staff are from Iraq. That is the diplomatic way to deal with the crisis created by the breaking of the diplomatic relations.



The telegram I received from Bagdad was shown to them. The officials were very courteous. But they demanded my photographs for their file. I did not have any extra photograph. Could I wait for another day? No. I wanted to fly the next day. Then they suggested that I could go across the road and get a photostat-copy from my passport photo. I got it made soon. Then they began to write the necessary papers. But they could not sign the visa form. They had to send it to the Consul in the real Indian Embassy building for signature. I promised to return after lunch break. Since it was my first visit to Washington D. C., a one hour delay helped me to have a look at the Capitol building and the river Potomac. I returned to Princeton the same afternoon with the visa to enter Iraq.

I had no money to buy the ticket. The Scholarship secretary was approached, but he asked me whether my Church would pay. I told him that the foreign exchange regulations were difficult and so I did not expect ticket from India.

Seeing an advertisement "Fly now, Pay later" I walked into a travel agent and explained my predicament. After listening patiently he asked me how I intended to repay the amount later. I told him I would earn money by babysitting and pay for the ticket. He laughed. He knew that I would have to sit for many babies before I earn 600 dollars for the ticket. And in America babies are not in plenty as they are in India!

When I explained everything to the scholarship secretary Dr. Pickens, he stated that he had just retired from his post a few days earlier. Still he talked to the people concerned and within a few minutes I was directed to go to the travel Agent to pick up my plane ticket.

I rushed to the travel Agent. The lady at the desk was courteous. She issued me an air ticket and asked me to rush to income tax office to obtain a clearance certificate. I hopped into a taxi. But it was the peak hour of traffic. The time was nearly 5 p. m. when my taxi stopped in front of a traffic signal. I rushed out of the taxi and ran the remaining one block to the office and climbed up the stairs only to see the sign "closed" placed in front of the queue. I began to panic. It was a Friday. The next two days were holidays. I had to fly actually on Saturday as I had already made a reservation a few minutes earlier.

Presently a person behind the counter came forward and told me that I did not have to stand in the queue. My paper was ready. I could not believe it. He explained that the travel Agent had telephoned to him realising that it was already late when I had left the office of the Travel Agency. He wished me a nice journey to Bagdad and shook hands with me. Instead of rejection, what a warm welcome! With a sense of triumph I returned to Princeton.

Since there was no time to pack I left some of my things in my room including my hair clipper which had helped me to save 3 dollars every month. I washed my clothes and put my pyjamas in the electric dryer and switched on the machine. It started spinning. It won't stop for another half an hour. Nor could I open the machine and take out my half dried clothes. As my friend Fr. A. T. Abraham promised to give his pyjamas I abandoned mine in the dryer as I did not want to miss the plane.

Before leaving Princeton I walked to the President's office to bid him good bye. Dr. Mc Cord asked me what

would be the name I would take at the time of my consecration as a bishop. I replied him that I have not chosen any name. Knowing my interest in studies on Nestorius he instantly suggested " Bishop Nestorius." I had no objection to it. But I do not know whether anybody took that name since John Nestorius. Bishop of Constantinople was condemned in 431 A. D. by council at Ephesus presided over by Cyril of Alexandria.

Fr. A. T. Abraham and deacon Varghese drove me to Kennedy international air port. On the way we stopped in the home of our friend Dr. Poulouse and ate Kerala curry and rice. As usual I started talking. My friends had to warn me about the plane. We rushed to Kennedy airport.

I made two long distance calls to my sister in Mount Pleasant and brother in Detroit to tell them that I was leaving the United States. "When are you leaving? Is there time for us to come and see you off?," they queried. I replied hurriedly "leaving in a few minutes. I am calling from the airport." Needless to say they could not reach there even if they flew. Thus I boarded a KLM plane to Bagdad with a stop at Copenhagen. Without touching London I returned to Bagdad on Saturday 14th September 1968.

## A YOUNG METROPOLITAN

On Sunday 15th September 1968 I reached Bagdad airport. Although it was my second visit to Bagdad, I was seeing the airport for the first time. Since members of our Church were there to receive me I could get through the immigration formalities quickly. I was escorted to the Opera Hotel where my predecessor Mar Thoma Darmo was staying since seventh September.

On 21st September on the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, I was made Bishop and given the name Mar Aprem. Mar Thoma Darmo whose 65th birthday coincided with the birthday of the mother of Christ asked me what name I preferred to accept as my consecration name. I stood there thinking. The name of Mar Aprem (Saint Ephrem, the Syrian) came to my mind. But I did not dare to suggest it as I did not know if there was any bishop by that name in our Church. Saint Ephrem was only a deacon. He was the greatest Syrian poet of the fourth century. His holy life had attracted me. As I was thinking in my,

mind, my consecrator stated " why not I suggest the name of Mar Aprem. He was the greatest scholar of our Church You are the first person to study for a doctorate ". I gladly accepted the suggestion. As for the date, my consecrators birthday was a mere coincidence. My previous ordination as a priest was on my own birthday three years earlier.

On 28th September I was promoted as Metropolitan (Archbishop). It was a surprise for me to accept such a responsibility at a such a young age. I had hoped for some experience as a Bishop under Mar Thoma Darmo who was only 65. But the events in Iraq made his presence in Bagdad neecesary. I had no other go but shoulder the heavy responsibilty. I was 28 years and 3 months old.

I stayed in Bagdad until 24th October. Mar Thoma Darmo wanted me to stay longer at Bagdad. But the Church affairs in Trichur required my presence and so I decided to return to India. Before leaving Bagdad some of our Church leaders arranged for my visit to Seleucia-Ctesiphon now known as Salman Pak. It was the headquarters of the East as well as of the empire. We saw the remains of the Church of the East as well as of the empire. We saw the remains of the Palace of King Khusrau as well as the Patriarchal Cathedral adjacent to it.

Babel was an attractive sight. It was the place where there was the tower of Babel. According to the story in the Holy Bible the birth of different languages took place during the construction of that tower. We also saw the famous hanging gardens. We were impressed by antiquity

of the area. Many tourists visit Babel which was not far from the city of Bagdad.

On October 24 Thursday, I was given a warm send off. A silver model of a date palm, was presented to me. Just like the coconut trees in Kerala, date palms are seen on both sides of most of the roads in Iraq with beautiful dates. Usually in India we see only the dry dates. But in Iraq when I saw the fresh dates it was so beautiful to look at and tasty to eat too. During my farewell speech I began with a few words in their spoken Assyrian language as a result of my six weeks stay in Bagdad. I had to switch over to English promising the delighted audience that I would speak in their language next time when I would visit them.

Evening of Thursday I said good bye to Mar Thoma Darmo who shed tears when he said good bye to his spiritual son. I told him that I would see him again either in India or in Bagdad. My guess was that he would live for at least 20 years as 65 was not an old age. But my hopes were wrong. Before another year passed, on 7 Sept 1969 on the first anniversary of his arrival, he died in the city of Bagdad where he resided for one year.

On Friday morning at about 3 or so our plane reached Bombay. Since I left Bagdad I stopped only at Quwait for a short time when we were allowed to go to the waiting room. When we reached Bombay I was so sleepy. Still I took my luggage and walked to the customs counter. Since I did not have a camera, tape recorder, or even a typewriter or any other valuables the customs officials let me go. They looked at my chain that glittered like gold. I volunteered to tell them that it was aluminium and costs only less than two rupees.

After I got through the customs I rushed to the Indian airlines flight to proceed to Cochin. But before an announcement was heard over the microphone that I was supposed to contact the Indian Airlines counter where somebody was waiting for me. I was wondering whether it was a friend or a foe. Yet I proceeded there and saw a friend who had flown from Cochin to warn me to postpone my trip by another day-The air hostess asked me to get in to the plane without further delay. This young man, N, V. Rappai, asked me not to proceed. Finally my reservation was changed into the afternoon flight on Saturday.

We got into a taxi in 'James Bond style' my friend rushing me into a taxi asking me to hide my face to escape the notice of any of our opponents. I was taken into a hotel room and the friend left me directing me not to open the door to anybody. We telephoned to Trichur about my arrival and enquired whether there was any development.

All this secrecy was owing to the possibility of a Court injunction, the enemies of my predecessor were planning to obtain from Trichur Munsiff where a major suit about the properties of the Church were pending.

At last I reached Cochin in the afternoon on Saturday. we telephoned to Trichur to find out whether there was any court injunction. Then it became clear there was no impediment against my entry and occupation of the Metropolitan Palace. Still I went to St. Thomas Church at Ernakulam hiding my face. Then we proceeded the 45 mile distance to Trichur before sunset.

The bells were tolling in our Churches announcing something important. It has done it once before on April 30, 1945 announcing the death of Mar Abimalek Timotheus. For nearly quarter of a century the bells never made a noise unexpectedly except at the arrival of Mar Darmo which was anticipated. But now within a few moments the secret came out. The opponents were perplexed to the point of inaction. They could not plan anything to stop. The civil and criminal courts were closed for the weekend. They had to wait till Monday morning to do anything.

Even the followers were not sure whether it was a stunt or true one. My parents were informed that I was coming after the bells began to toll. The clergy were confused. So it was true. How was it a secret? They all knew why it was a secret. But they wondered "how"?

Before I reached Trichur town some supporters came from there to escort my car. As they shouted "Jai, Jai, Mar Aprem" I thought then that within a few minutes I would hear "Down, Down, Mar Aprem". But contrary to my expectation the negative slogans and black flags were not heard or seen. The opposite group was too perplexed to plan a suitable strategy to prevent my entry into the Metropolitan's Palace or to the Big Church.

The enthusiastic crowd at the Chaldean Syrian Big Church gave me a rousing reception. I was overcome with emotion as I saw the happy faces of my people after two years. My words were choked as I attempted to speak to the people, as my predecessor proclaimed more than sixteen years earlier, that I would live and work and die for them. The official car was brought to the



Church and I was escorted to the Metropolitan's palace through the front gate. As the Metropolitan's Palace is next door to the Big Church I could easily walk through the side gate. But first entry should be official and formal, through the front gate with proper protocol. A dinner was arranged for all the clergy. After the dinner was over at about 10 p.m. I thought I could 'hit the sack', to use an American slang.

But another important item on the agenda of that hectic day was about to begin. The legal advisor of the Church, Advocate P.P. Devassy, was coming to consult me about the future strategy. By midnight I was apprised of the legal aspects. Strategy was chalked out. As a regular Representative Meeting had been called for the next day i.e. Sunday I was to be officially accepted by the Representative Council. I was also allowed to schedule the ordination of new priests and deacons on Monday morning before the civil courts opened.

Four deacons and priests were ordained on Monday morning. Sunday was a busy day choosing candidates for priesthood. As one deacon who was strongly recommended for ordination to priesthood by my predecessor declined to accept the offer owing to the secular job he was doing I had to find a suitable substitute. As I was away from India for two previous years it was necessary to consult knowledgeable people before I took such an important decision.

On Monday morning by 10 a. m. the pop guns were fired jubilantly announcing the successful conclusion of the ordination service. But when the court was opened by 11 a. m. the opposite party filed a petition in

Munsiff Court requesting a prohibitory injunction against me in a suit which was already pending. But the learned Munsiff did not grant the injunction sought for as I was not a party in the pending suit. They were asked to file a new suit in an appropriate court.

It took about two weeks for them to file a new suit (No 116/68) in the court of a sub judge for an injunction. The sub judge Mr. Krishnan Nair granted the injunction ex parte. It was a prohibitory injunction asking me not to enter the Metropolitan's Palace. But when the injunction notice was served on me I signed as one who is residing in the Bishop's Palace. Since I was already residing before the injunction was issued or filed even, the prohibitory injunction did not serve any practical purpose. As I write these words more than twelve years after this prohibitory injunction was in force, you can imagine how ineffective this legal process is. Of course the opponents filed a violation petition against me in civil court standing that I was still staying in the palace even after the injunction order. The new sub-judge Mr. Abdullakutty took a just view that the injunction is only prohibitory and therefore there is no violation of the court order by my continued occupation of the Bishop's Palace. The same view was taken by the Additional District Judge and the High Court.

The history of civil suits during the last decade is very complicated. It would take a separate book in order to give an accurate and balanced picture of what happened in the courts. Some are strange but they are true. One thing is true that some thought they could scare me by filing suits more and more. They suggested that I could go back to America and escape from these suits. As a

dutiful servant I did not run away from my responsibilities. I do not enjoy civil suits. But I do not think one should agree to every unjust demands or pressure tactics. Nobody should exploit or oppress his brother. I desire peace. But if one or a group of people deliberately disturb peace, I am willing to be disturbed and to stand up to face it.

Public reception in Trichur was arranged for November 16, 1968. Bishops were invited. Mr. B. Wellington, Minister of Health of the Kerala State, Captian A. N. Menon, Municipal Chairman, and others were invited. Although I was just new to my office, I asked the reception committee not to waste too much money. Yet about five thousand rupees were spent for various expenses. It was indeed a large reception. The opponents tried to obtain an injunction against the reception. But the court refused to interfere in a reception given by those who recognize me. Then opponents put pressure on the bishops who had agreed to preside over and felicitate on the occasion. Although some of them hesitated to come to the meeting as a result of the threats and adverse propaganda of the opponents, finally they agreed to come. After seeing such an organized audience sitting in silence, one of the bishops remarked that it would have been a loss if he had not come. During the dinner that followed the reception, I was in a jovial mood and began to crack jokes. One of the guests later told his friend who is a member of my Church to tell me not to tell jokes since such a behaviour would be below the dignity of a bishop. Although I did not agree with his views, I decided to be more sober with my tongue.

Since I was away from India for the previous two years I had no contact with Church leaders in Kerala and outside. But several of them were known to me while I was a deacon or priest. Therefore without hesitation I decided to renew my acquaintance with Church leaders in Kerala. Within a week after my public reception I was invited to Ernakulam to participate in the felicitation accorded to the Most. Rev. Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan on his 75th birthday. Then in December I was present along with Archbishop Parecattil and Archbishop Attipetti at Ernakulam for the Ecumenical Christian Carol Service. Within a few months most bishops in Kerala became my personal friends.

The Prime Minister of India was visiting Kerala in December 1968 for the 450th anniversary of the Jewish Synagogue in Cochin. I wrote to the Prime Minister that I would like to meet her as a courtesy call, as both my predecessors late Mar Thimotheus Metropolitan and the Mar Thoma Darmo were known to her personally. Although no interviews were allowed during that brief visit of a few hours, only I was given a special consideration. I was uneasy to go to the Guest House at Ernakulam where Mrs. Indira Gandhi was talking with the Chief Minister of Kerala Mr. E. M. S. Namboodiripad. There were several leaders of the Congress party. Mr. K. P. Madhavan Nair escorted me upstairs to Mrs Gandhi, and introduced me. She said the usual "Namaste" with folded hands and a smile. With her saree covering her head, she appeared to be devout and modest. She recalled her visit to the Metropolitan's Palace in Trichur with her parents to meet the late Mar Thimotheus. She enquired about Mar Thoma Darmo who also was known to her. I told her that he was in Bagdad and he had entrusted the administration

of the Church in India to me. She posed for a photograph.

When I visited Trivandrum for Kerala Christian Council I took the opportunity to make a courtesy call to the Governor of Kerala. Mr. Viswanathan, a Malayalee who does not speak Malayalam, listened to my 'non-stop talk' for a few minutes and asked me "How do you manage to talk in English so fast?" I replied that I was away from India for the previous years and I was forced to speak in English. I spoke fast, so that my English grammar mistakes may not be detected.

The Maharaja of Travancore was residing in his palace in Trivandrum. He has now no powers or pension, but has immense wealth for his living. Since he is single he has no need to provide for posterity. I was escorted into the huge palace. The Maharaja came to me with a smile. I shook hands with him. We had a friendly chat. When I was about to leave, one of our Trustees Dr. N. O. Francis, requested the Maharaja to pose for a photograph. He answered that he was not fully dressed for a photograph and it could be done later. When I returned after the visit, I told one of the bishops attending the Kerala Christian Council that my courtesy call with the Maharaja was over. He asked, "how did you greet His Highness?" I replied that I shook hands with a Maharajah. "Oh, no," said he "You are not supposed to shake hands with a Maharaja. You should bow before him." I quipped that these Maharajahs were no more rulers. Moreover I was not a subject of the Maharajah of Travancore but of Cochin state."

Our Church was not a member of the Kerala Christian Council. The secretary K. A. Mathew wrote to me

requesting to read a paper in the Trivandrum assembly as Mr. M. M. Thomas who was expected to read the paper would not be able to, owing to his wife's sickness. Mr. Mathew introduced himself to me saying that Deacon George Mookan of our Church is known to him. I replied saying that I did not require an introduction of your friend Deacon George Mookan because I am he. Now my name is changed but the person is not changed.

During the assembly at Trivandrum I was elected to the Kerala Christian Council Executive Committee. The Rev. M. A. Z. Rolston of the National Christian Council of India was present, and he suggested that our Church should take membership in the National Christian Council with its headquarters at Nagapur. So I was present in the triennial assembly of the National Christian Council held in Kottayam in 1971. There too I was elected to its executive, which was a surprise to me. But it helped me to come into contact with Church leaders outside Kerala.

In 1973 I attended the Church History Association triennial meeting in Dharmaram College, Bangalore. I was elected as one of the two Vice Presidents of that organization. As a student of Church History I was happy to be associated with that organization. The following assembly which met in Bombay in 1976 elected me as the President. It was a normal election as the President had completed two terms and the senior Vice President was away in Europe. Still it was a surprise to me to think of myself being elected as the President of an organization of scholars, mostly professors of Church History in Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic theological

colleges in India. I decided to write more on Church History to justify my office as the President of CHAI.

In 1976 February I travelled by train to Delhi to represent our Church in the first Board meeting of the reorganized Churches' Auxiliary for Social Action. About thirty leaders, both laity and the clergy, were present. When the name of the ten member executive committee was announced I was again surprised to find my name. As I represent one of the small Churches in that all India organization I never anticipated that my name would be in the list. One reason was that by that time I was, personally known to several Church leaders as I had served on the executive of the National Christian Council during the period 1971-75. Moreover the general trend was and is even now to elect young people to decision making bodies. So I was elected along with 75 year old Mr. Sadhu Samuel, twice my age. The membership in the CASA executive required my presence in Delhi four or five times a year. Although it took up a portion of my time from Trichur, I did not count it a loss, as service to mankind is part of my Christian responsibility.

In Trichur, I worked in various organizations of ecumenical nature. I served as president of the Trichur branch of the Bible Society and as the patron of the united evangelistic committees. I also co-operated with the Trichur Ecumenical group. As president of the Trichur unit of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, (C. I. S. R. S) it was my privilege to work with Christians and non-Christians from various walks of life who had concern for the betterment of the society.

Recently another organization has been formed called *Indian Institute for Christian Research* with headquarters

in Trichur. This is an intellectual group interested in research and writing as well as preservation of the cultural heritage of the Christians in India, particularly in Kerala. A writer Mr. P. Thomas of Trichur took the initiative to form a museum of Christian art. He was assisted by the young enthusiastic editor of St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia, Mr. George Menachery. They elected me as the President in the first meeting itself. I have not done much for it so far.

The larger portion of my time since 1968, was spent in Trichur. Sometimes it looked as if I needed more time in Trichur to attend to the routine responsibilities as well as visiting the various parishes in and around Trichur. More time and attention was needed to answer the letters promptly. Though I did not have a full time typist, I could send out more than four thousand letters during the last years.

At least six hundred articles were written which were published not only in *Voice of the East* but also in other publications in both English and Malayalam. My ambition to be successful Christian writer compelled me occasionally to rewrite the articles for perfection. Nevertheless lack of time did not always permit me to do so. As a student of Church history I took pains to check the historical facts of what I wrote much more than the style of writing, which I hope would improve as I continue to write.

Speaking about writing, I want to mention that I wished to write a book, an autobiography, with the above title in order to tell in detail the story of the early years of a young man as the head of a Church. It will reveal the inside



reactions of the leader of a Church - the disappointments and difficulties, the happiness and accomplishments, the trials and tribulations etc.

Alas I could not write it as I wanted. One reasonable excuse is lack of time. But it is not all. Like many others, I do not want to reveal the inside story, the facts and figures, the frustrations, the unnecessary burdens brought by members of the same Church, acting as a rival group. To make the record straight, I hasten to add that this unfortunate groupism is not of my own making, it is what I inherited.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the events of the past 12 years could really be a novel, depicting the lives of many lively characters with peculiar attitudes and reactions. The experience with court cases, the people who praise me much more than I deserve and the people who oppose me for no reason, the obscene literature that was published, the anonymous letters threatening me, abortive attempt to confiscate my car, violation case asking the court to put me in civil prison which was dismissed in all the three courts (Sub Court, District Court and High Court) etc. could be a best seller or thriller if I had the time and talent to write a novel. Many interesting characters of such a book would have appeared as imaginary ones because of the unbelievable part they played in this drama.

I have come across strange characters like a muscular man who asked my predecessor to go and hang, and afterwards went and hanged himself; a priest who filed a suit against me and gave many false charges against me, died before he knew that all the charges

brought against me were finally dismissed; another old priest who went to the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi, against my possession of the Church Schools, died just one day prior to the hearing of the case; the supreme leader of the rival party taking a bride at the age of 66 and consequently was disowned by his own admirers who had always insisted that nobody should criticise or disobey him; and many others.

As the head of the Church I had to provide for a place of worship to our congregation in Madras. They were worshipping in the St. Paul's High School Chapel in Vepery. My predecessor had asked me soon after my consecration as Bishop in Bagdad to endeavour for the construction of a Church in Madras. It was very difficult to raise funds. It also meant dealing with people properly, to get the support of all people, rich and poor.

After the Church was constructed, I went to Madras in December 1971 for its dedication. I was given a warm welcome at the railway station. Somebody photographed as I was walking through the platform after alighting from the first class compartment. When the camera was clicked I was near a third class compartment. They thought that it was below the dignity (Whose dignity? Theirs or mine?) if the number III was seen behind me in the photograph. Then when I got into the car I noticed that they had made a flag fixed on the car. The members said that it was below the dignity of the Metropolitan to travel in a car without an official flag. I wondered if the people in the town knew that it was a borrowed car?! Ofcourse they had insisted on my going to Madras in my car only. But I did not like to

travel nearly 400 miles on Indian roads. At that time petrol did not cost more than a single first class train ticket. I was accommodated in a comfortable room in Dasprakash Hotel.

The readers may think from the above few lines that what a royal welcome this young man received. If you are jealous of my privileged status, wait to hear the next happening. A leading lawyer from a denomination came and told me that he arrived to take me in his car to visit and pray in one of our homes which was bereaved a few days ago. Immediately the organizers said that I should not go. They decided my programme. Then I knew that all the flag and the reception etc did not give me the basic freedom to visit a bereaved family. Finally I had to gently remind them that I went to Madras at my own expense and I was willing to do the dedication of the Church and any other services. Whatever I did in my free time was upto me to decide. And I went. It is very difficult to please all.

Regular Church administration has similar problems. Everybody wants to keep the dignity of the Metropolitan. Some members have no special intention. Others have motives of their own. Personally I never liked to be an object of exhibition. In Kerala, Bishops are often exhibited with golden chains around their necks. Although I occasionally yielded to their wishes in wearing the golden chain, I regularly used my chain which I bought at Baghdad for less than two rupees. I never encourage too much paraphernalia. When the congregation takes me in a procession, I do not enjoy it nor do I consider it a special honour. But the people who watch and walk in

the procession, take extra pleasure in going on procession and enjoy it in my name.

Bible class was started in Big Church on Wednesdays. People from various parishes began to attend. Dr & Mrs. Pickens of America spoke on the first day. Some clergy advised me not to go to the Bible classes as it was below my dignity!! They stated it was only the duty of the ordinary priests to conduct weekly classes. But I did not agree with such false notions. One thing cannot be forgotten. The contact with the people through the weekly Bible class helped me to gain the support of them for the various causes of Church. Especially after the temporary split in the Church in 1964 the women were not properly organized. Hence the Bible class brought together the women of various parishes once a week.

Foreign friends occasionally came as guests at the Metropolitan's Palace. Some of them preached in the Bible classes or special meetings. This gave me an opportunity to offer hospitality to foreign friends in gratitude to the hospitality I had enjoyed in several foreign homes during my studies in England and America. One American lady noticed that there was no bath tub in the bathroom. Therefore she did not take bath or shower during the six days she stayed here. Some people did not drink water as they were afraid that their stomach would get upset if they drank our water. One did not like our food and therefore ate enough vitamins daily and ate little. Even when food was not tasty they kept on saying that it was wonderful. They thanked me many times. If one has to say "thank you" several times for such ordinary food, how much more we have to thank

for real good food? If such things are described "wonderful", what will be the word for real "wonderful" things?

Co-operation with the Roman Catholics was a controversial question for our members in Trichur. The reason was the fact that in the last century the Syrian Catholics of Trichur and the Chaldean Syrians were one community. Both the groups hated each other. The Chaldean Syrians counted the Catholics as enemies and other non-Catholic Churches as friends. The Chaldean Syrians welcome inter-marriages in Kunnankulam where there were more members of the Orthodox Syrian Church. Mar Abimalek Timotheus towards the end of his life adopted a friendly policy towards the Catholics. After his death on 30 April 1945, the Chaldeans began to accuse the Catholics for luring away their members. Mar Thoma Darmo who arrived in June 1952 kept a distance though he attended some functions of the Catholics.

After my coming in 1968, I followed the policy of my predecessor Mar Thoma Darmo. As I was a local boy and could speak the language of the people, often I was invited to speak in their various Churches. Some warned me against such "surrender" to the Catholics. But I believe that in the ecumenical age, a reconciliatory policy is ideal. We may be losers in this deal as we are a small Church. Nevertheless Christian charity does not advocate a policy of hate and false propaganda. Unfortunately when one of my close friends, Poubore Mar Philexinos, a Metropolitan of a small sister Church, crossed over to the Roman Catholic faith in 1977 some spread the rumour that my turn was next!

## DOCTORAL STUDIES

Our Church felicitated me on my getting the Doctor of Theology degree from the University of Serampore near Calcutta in West Bengal.

Not only that the topic of my thesis was on our Church, but also that I wrote it while I served the Church. To be the head of a Church itself is a difficult task. Then to do research and write a doctoral dissertation is much more 'ambitious'! Some wondered how I did it inspite of the civil suits. Is it inspite of it or is it because of the civil suits?

When I took charge of the administration of the Indian Church in October 1968, I concentrated in the Church activities. And a major part of the Church activities meant civil suits. But after one and a half years in Trichur I was able to visit the United Theological College, Bangalore where I had studied for my M.Th degree in 1964-66. There I met the new professor of Church History, Dr. T. V. Philip. He encouraged me to register for Doctor of Theology degree of Serampore through the United Theological College, Bangalore. Thus I registered for D. Th. degree of Serampore in 1970.

My hopes that the civil suits concerning the Church will come to an end did not come true. I had to struggle hard to find time for research while staying in the Metropolitan's Palace in Trichur. Every alternate month I went to Bangalore to report to my professor Dr. T. V. Philip about my research. My days in Bangalore were also hard working days. There were some books I wanted to read. Then almost everyday I would go to my professor Dr. T. V. Philip and read to him what I wrote during that month or so.

Many of my assertions were questioned by him, guidance was given in writing history. In college I was a student of mathematics and not of history. However, like most Syrian Christians in Kerala I thought that I knew quite a lot about the history of my Church. But those prejudiced versions of our church history will not be acceptable to the examiners of Serampore. Therefore I had to write and rewrite the drafts.

I did not get enough time to spend in the library in Bangalore. I had to attend to the civil suits, bless the marriages, conduct funerals and preside over parish festivals. I found it difficult to get free time for a longer period. Whenever I managed to get two weeks continuously in Bangalore, then I had to rush to Trichur. But in Trichur too, I was doing research. For civil suits I needed information. So I searched the past documents. But the time I spent for searching the documents served two purposes. To win the civil suits and secondly to fill the pages of my thesis.

## THIRD TRIP ABROAD

For more than eight years after becoming bishop I did not travel abroad. When many of my colleagues in Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant denominations went abroad I stayed on in India. Some opportunities were there. But I did not feel like leaving the country even for a short duration.

Finally after my doctorate I felt that I could go abroad for a brief period to visit America as well as Iraq where I was made bishop.

When my four brothers and sisters bought me a return ticket (This time I knew for sure that "return" meant going and coming) I thought my worry was over. But the later developments proved otherwise. The delay to get a new passport and other travel formalities are dealt with in detail in the travelogue *America Revisited*. Hence repetition is avoided here.

Easter in April 1977 was in Chicago. My old friend Archdeacon Sadok de Mar Shimon whom I met, went on talking endlessly. The Assyrians in Chicago were delighted



to hear an Indian recite prayers in the ancient language of their forefathers. But when some tried to talk to me in the Assyrian language I had to disappoint them by speaking in a mixture of English-Assyrian that I could recite prayers but not converse in their language.

It took 45 days to visit friends and relatives in the U. S. A. From Chicago car journey to Bowling Green, Ohio, appeared to be slow. Since roads are superior than that of India and cars are airconditioned and seat cushions are comfortable the speed of the car was not felt. Moreover the speed had been decreased from 70 miles per hour to 55 in order to save gasoline. It was news to me that at 55 miles per hour the car could save energy than higher speed. Whenever there was a rush to reach somewhere some people used to speed up. We saw not only traffic police on motorcycles trying to catch those who were over speeding, but also helicopters flying low to read the number plates of the cars speeding beyond the permitted speed limit.

From Ann Arbor I bought a 21 day railway pass of Amtrak for 220dollars. It was cheaper in April. In June & July- August due to the summer holidays the cost of the same ticket was to exceed 300 dollars. Using the Amtrak pass I travelled first to Minneapolis, Minnesota.

My next destination was San Francisco. From Minneapolis I flew to Nebraska. From there I got into the train and started writing my travelogue. Trains are convenient in America. Certain coaches are designated no-smoking areas where passengers could travel without being disturbed by cancer causing smoke.

At San Francisco I saw Grace Cathedral, Roman Catholic Cathedral, Golden Gate Bridge. Fishermans

Wharf, San Francisco University etc. I was the guest of Vagabond Hotel. Such a free hospitality was offered because my host Fr. Charles was working at the front Desk of that Hotel. I was interviewed over the K G BI Radio for the Religious News programme broadcast on Sunday mornings. Mr. Youel A Baba working in Betchel Corporation gave me a sumptuous fish dinner at Fisherman's Wharf.

Jos Mookan, my eldest brother, working at that time in San Diego drove about 500 miles to San Francisco with his wife and two daughters to take me from San Francisco to his home. During the long and hectic drive we stopped with Yacob. in Turlock for lunch and a chat with daacon Yuash Kallaitha who was 83 and had supper at midnight in Simi Valley with Benjamin Yalda.

At San Diego we saw "Sea World", the world famous San Diego Zoo. Rides on the American Airlines Tower, Sea, World Hydfoil Boats and Sea World Skyride were scaring to me but delightful to my little nieces

Disneyland near Los Angeles was another memorable experience. It has been described as "a marvel of technological ingenuity". We went for several rides such as monorail, submarines, train, boat. The worst (or the best for children) was the metahorn. I went over artificial mountains and water falls, going up and down. Another scary ride during which the children kept on laughing was when our ride took us through a dark area where 'ghosts' made all kinds of noise to frighten us.

From Disneyland I went to Santa Barbara and then to Hollywood. There I stayed at Toluca Motel, where I enjoyed the 'magic fingers.'

When I put quarter of a dollar coin to the box near my bed, the moving fingers fixed below my bed started moving for 15 minutes. These moving fingers gave good sleep within the fifteen minutes. If I did not sleep within 15 minutes I had to put another coin to enjoy the magic for another 15 minutes

Flight from Los Angeles to St. Louis, Missouri was in an ordinary plane. But the connection from St. Louis to Jefferson city was in a mini plane of skyline. But they advertised. 'We are the smallest, but the greatest with maximum number of connections' I did not realise how small they were until I got into the plane which was smaller than a van or station wagon with four small chairs on the right and four on the left with a few inches space in between. It did not go very high in the sky. It was somewhere in the mid air. It was noisy too. I felt I was going to survive that flight.

At Jefferson city my stay was with my sister Leela and her family. Her husband Dr. Alexander Alex is the head of the Dept. of Economics at Lincoln University. Her son Saji could understand a word or two in Malayalam. But her daughter Asha could not understand a single word of her father's and mother's mother tongue. Both her mother and father would speak Malayalam at home. But for little Asha it was of no use.

From Jefferson city it was a pleasant train journey to Boston. During that journey my '21 day pass' was to expire. I could continue in the same train for a day or two until the termination of that trip. If I were to change the train then I would have to buy another ticket as 21

days had expired. Hence on the 21st day I got into train and continued my journey on the 22nd day in the same train.

'M-a-n, you are from India?' asked a Negro traveller who sat near me in the dining car. I began to talk to him. 'I like you m-a-n. Is there difference between your blood and my blood m-a-n. It is the same with this white man also. I do not like him. I want to pick up a quarrel with him before I reach New York. I like you m-a-n. Because you are talking with me m-a-n.'

He poured beer to his glass and sipped. Then before finishing his glass he went to the bar and bought beer again. I asked him why he bought more beer while he had some left. He said it was not cool enough. I spoke to him against drinking. He was trying to give it up. His wife who is a school teacher does not like his drinking. So he does not drink while at home. But on travel he must make up for it.

At Boston I was the guest of Mr. Streeter Stuart and family. I was interviewed on WEEI radio on 'View Point on Religion' programme. Five members on the panel asked me various pertinent questions concerning our Church and I calmly and readily replied all the questions nearly for one hour.

My visits to the Harvard University, Peabody Museum in Boston, Gordon Cornwell Seminary etc., were very useful. I preached in the chapel of Gordon Cornwell Seminary where Dr. Douglas Stuart (second son of the Stuart) was teaching Old Testament. Son of a former President of the U. S. A., Gerald Ford was studying in that Seminary. Many were interested to hear about our Church.

It was a pleasant opportunity to meet Dr. Claude Pickens who was the scholarship secretary during my studies in the U. S. A. in 1966-68. Dr. Stanley Thoburn and his wife Pearl who had taught me at Jabalpur were delighted to see me after 16 years.

At Washington D. C., I had a busy programme. Miss. Theresia Varghese, sister of my brother-in-law working in the World Bank took me to the Church where she worshipped. Dr. Roper, the pastor, invited me to preach on the following Sunday. But I had to go to Toronto. She also introduced me to Rev. Bob Strain in the Presbyterian Church. He arranged for me to attend the International Prayer Breakfast on Friday. There too I met many good Christian friends.

The Smithsonian Museum is one of the best museums in the world. Since I had been to Peabody Museum at Harvard, some things exhibited at Smithsonian were repetitions. Still it was worth visiting. Many expensive diamonds and pearls including very precious stones from India were on exhibition there. Policemen were guarding these costly stones. I wondered how difficult it would be to estimate the cost of the properties of that Museum. It would be in millions and billions.

As Theresia Vargese and myself walked out of these Museums some decently dressed young people began to argue with us. They said that they believed in Hare Rama Hare Krishna cult. Judging from the Saree of Miss Varghese and my beard the young men knew that we were from India. But to their surprise, we said that we were not the followers of their sect.

"Krishna is the father of Christ" declared one of these young people. I could not help but laugh at this strange idea. I told him that I had never heard such a fantastic claim that Krishna is father of Christ. Then they argued that Christ himself stated that he is the son of Krishna. They began to quote Scriptures. I quoted John 14:6 "I am the way, the Truth and the life" says Jesus Christ.

Visit to the Library of Congress was a memorable experience. Another memorable visit was to Adam Benjamin Jr. an Assyrian member of the U. S. Congress. Mr. Antony Planthara my host took me to some older places of interest such as Arlington Cemetery, White House, Capitol, Museums etc.

From Washington I flew to Toronto. There were several friends to receive me at the airport.

We had dinner in the house of Wilson Padavan, an engineer from my neighbourhood. Trichur friends gathered around the dinner table where many Kerala dishes were served with real Kerala taste. While we were eating Kerala food and talking in Malayalam language it was difficult to distinguish whether we were in Toronto or in Trichur.

The famous Ontario Science Centre is just opposite to the apartment where Wilson Padavan resides. So the next morning we walked to the Ontario Science Centre. Since we had planned to reach Sunny Nellingara for lunch we had only very limited time at our disposal. Still we decided to get a quick look at the Science Centre where groups in buses began to arrive.

C. N. Tower is the tallest building in the world. We decided to go to the top of it. It is taller than the 103 storey Empire State building of New York and 110 storey Sears building in Chicago. This tower was completed only recently. The shape is the same as that of the Olympic Village tower in Munich constructed in 1972. The top is for the communications.

There is a revolving restaurant somewhere in the upper stories. I did not eat there, because the rates are prohibitive. The prices go spiralling up as we go up on the building. Another advantage is that we keep rotating while eating. But the hospitality of my hosts was so heavy that I could not eat even what I was offered.

I was invited to have dinner that night with my second cousin Inasu Mooken who is settled down in Toronto. Several friends and relatives from Kerala were invited there. Food as usual is purely Keralite i. e. rice, curry, papad, pickle, curd etc. We talked about many matters. When the dinner was over it was midnight.

Niagra falls is a place which most of the tourists to North America never miss. When I was studying in America ten years earlier I had desired to visit the Niagra Falls. But due to the problem of visa as mentioned earlier, I did not dare to venture it. Now I was in Toronto. Apart from meeting friends and relatives my itinerary included Niagra Falls.

We walked closer to the Falls. Then I realised that it was going to be cooler than what my body could tolerate. We went back and I took my overcoat. We became a part of the thousands and ten thousands of people

strolling into the falls area. Being a holiday the crowd was quite large. The average attendance there is five million a year.

The Niagra river has waters from the lakes Horon, Michigan, Superior and Erie. The Falls has a large spread with a steep drop of about 200 ft. Every second five and a half million litres of water falls over an expanse of two thousand and two hundred feet. It was first discovered by a French explorer Father Louis Hennepin in 1678 in the area of Red Indians.

At about two O'clock we left the parking area without taking lunch. We decided to eat Lunch after reaching the U. S. A. which was only a few minutes away. But we took a wrong turn and returned by the same route and finally reached the bridge to cross the international border. The American officer looked at my passport and instructed us to drive to the customs hall just on the rightside.

The U. S. customs officials decided to check the car and my suit cases. I guess they suspected us of smuggling some hashish or things like that in which Indians were involved. Why should these Indians cross the border? I showed my ticket to New York from Buffalo airport. That too did not satisfy the officials.

My destination after Canada was New York and Princeton. At Princeton it was a pleasant surprise for the children I used to babysit in 1967-68 to see me as a Bishop. They too had grown up. Dr. James Mc Cord, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, was so happy to meet me. I stayed for two days in the home of Jose Mundassery in Princeton.



After 45 days I returned to England. It was my third visit there. I stayed there for about 2 weeks with my sister's family in Rugby. I also stayed with Dr. O. R. Timothy and wife Dr. Molly at Leeds.

My sister Sushila wanted to know news about home and relatives. And I enjoyed talking. But at one stage I thought that I was repeating some of the family news for the fourth time in this trip. In a mischievous moment I wished that I should have taped it and played back the tape recorder to my two brothers and two sisters instead of repeating it four times. I know of some pastors in America who record an evening prayer on the tape and connect it to their telephone when they leave their office in the evening. Anybody requiring a prayer from the pastor just dial - a - prayer! How convenient!

During my visit to England in 1961-62, I had stayed with Nigel White in Coventry. I had forgotten his address. But since I was staying in Rugby which is near Coventry, I desired to trace Nigel White. After looking at the telephone number of several N. Whites, my brother-in-law called one. The person at the other end replied that she was ninety years old and she was not the man whom we are looking for. She suggested the number of another Nigel White. That man replied that he was not the man whom we were searching for. Without disappointment we tried a third White. It worked. His wife was delighted to hear my voice after 16 years. The next day when we were being entertained at dinner, we had a lot to talk about them and the Cathedral at Coventry.

From England I went to Germany. It was my first trip to Germany, although I had been to Geneva in 1962.

My preliminary knowledge of German helped me a little. Yet lack of ability to speak in German was indeed a handicap. From Frankfurt, I went to Nurnberg, Furth, Erlangen, Munich, Rotheburg, Bonn, Cologne, Bielefeld. Paderborn, Dusseldorf and Wurzburg.

In Munich I was the guest of P. C. Mathew, my colleague at Bangalore. In Bielefeld I stayed with Fr. Korah Varghese whose acquaintance I made only during this journey. At Paderborn I was the guest of my German friend Dr. Johannes Madey. My stay in Dusseldorf was with another German friend John Beeker Comes whose friendship I had cultivated through correspondence.

The Olympic Stadium of 1972 was an attraction in Munich. In Germany my main stay was with my old collegemate Dr. Ullrich Meyer., pastor of the Lutheran Church in Furths. His wife stated that I was their first sleeping guest.

Stay at Niederaltaich abbey founded in 781 A. D. as the guest of my namesake Fr. Ephrem Eissing was inspiring.

At Wurzburg railway station I was confronted by a small crowd of Germans (admirers?) "Are you the President? Are you Idi Amin"? With a smiling face I replied "I am not Idi Amin. He is bigger than me." The previous night the television had announced that Idi Amin was flying somewhere near Germany, as he was not welcome in the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference held during the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

From Iraq I went to Bagdad. After my visits in 1963 and 1968 I could see Iraq progressing. I stayed for 10 days at the Patriarchete just opposite to the Technological University. The members of our Church were happy to see me after nine years. My visit to the Bagdad Museum was indeed informative. Our Church members requested me to stay longer. Since it was more than 10 weeks after I started my journey before Easter I longed to get back to Trichur, assuring them of a fourth visit in future.

## WRITING CAREER

Writing seems to be an inborn taste in me. During school days I wrote in a manuscript magazine. The big break to find my name in print came in 1954. My brother Jose Mookken was the first printer and publisher of *Voice of the East* magazine started under the auspices of the Youth Association of our Church. Since it was new, there were not enough articles for publication. My brother persuaded me to write because I was already a part-time Seminary student. I was only 14 years old and my eldest brother only 20 then.

The first article published was my own sermon entitled "Faith" based on the biblical verse Hebrews XII: 1. Thus began an unexpected hobby in my life. Since then I have published at least six hundred articles during the last 26 years both in English and Malayalam issues of that magazine. I think that I have written the maximum number of articles in this periodical in its entire history of quarter of a century.

But I lacked systematic training. It was my desire to undergo some regular training in journalism. There was no

time owing to my studies. Nevertheless during my Master's degree course in theology in New York I thought of availing the opportunity to take a correspondence course in Christian journalism. Answering to an advertisement I became a student of the Christian Writer's Institute, Wheaton, Illinois.

75 dollars was were paid while studying in New York. When I left America I had completed only five lessons. In India I did not have the files and the books with me as there was no time to pack any of these things while leaving Princeton for Bagdad in response to an urgent telegram. However, I decided to complete my course in Christian Writing Techniques in order to be more efficient in my ministry. In 1972 I managed to obtain the files and books and renew my registration for this course. When the sixth lesson was completed I had the joy of receiving the 'Press Pass' which one day might help me to interview the President of the United States. In 1973 I completed my 10th lesson. I was thrilled to touch with my own hands the attractive diploma which was the recognition of my constant endeavour. This course also taught me that there is no short cut to success in the field of writing just as in many other fields.

Then I registered for the advanced course. The authorities suggested that I could do either the course on "fiction" or "magazine". My preference was for the latter because my need in work was some tools to write for Christian magazines or such journals. I took all the ten lessons with a good speed and completed them with in one year. Considering the distance from U. S. A. to Trichur and the delay of four months it took for just one lesson by sea mail to reach me in Trichur, it is a good

speed. Most of the lessons could be answered only after the previous lesson reached me after correction. Understanding my difficulty, the Christian Writer's Institute sent me the remaining lessons by airmail.

Although I was encouraged to do further training under them, the fees was so high (more than one and a half thousand rupees for a course of ten lessons) that I decided to be content with what I have learnt. I decided to put my newly acquired knowledge into practice.

While doing research for my thesis I had to gather a lot of information on historical data about my two immediate predecessors. Lot of these materials were to be cut out from the doctoral deissertation. I did not want it to be wasted. Hence I decided to publish their biographies.

The Church in Cochin was planning to publish a souvenir in connection with the tenth anniversary of the Mar Sliva Church. Therefore they were looking for articles to fill the pages of the souvenir. I suggested that I would write a biography of the late Mar Thoma Darmo Metropolitan who founded that Church. They liked the idea. Hence my first book was published from Mar Narsai Press, Trichur in 1974.

The reactions to my first literary product was greatly encouraging. But since the late Mar Thoma Darmo had several enemies, they did not like some of the comments made in the book. But reviews in local newspapers were positive. Nevertheless, the review in *South India Churchman* published from Madras was not very encouraging. He opined that the book has only a limited appeal, which is true. He further stated that it deals with court cases with which the members of his Christian denomination (Church of South India) has nothing to do with.

And that comment was not true. He also blamed that the printing and format was "atrocious." I still do not know what he really meant.

Not deterred by the adverse comment made by the above reviewer I put my mind and attention to the second biography. It was entitled *Mar Abimalek Timotheus*. It was a bigger book and the format was less "atrocious" to use the phraseology of the retired professor of English who reviewed the previous one. I sent this book too to the same publication in Madras. The editor sent it to another former professor of English in India, but this an English man himself.

This reviewer wrote a better and lengthier review. Although the second book contained more pages dealing with civil suits the reviewer did not blame me for dealing with it. Instead he concluded his review with the words "It adds to one's appreciation of the problems of Church leadership and of what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians 'of the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the Churches.'"

He, however, pointed out that "the text is unfortunately marred by many errors of grammar and would have benefitted by more exact proof-reading." I cannot but plead guilty of it. I always wish to improve the errors of printing. His words of appreciation was part of the reward for a beginner like me. He wrote "the author may be congratulated on the thoroughness of his investigations and on his desire to make the biography, as he himself writes, balanced and unbiased. Truly, as he claims, in some pages it has a propensity to read like a novel."

Such reviews were sufficient to encourage me to go on writing. Some local people who read it also encouraged

to pursue this path. Deacon G. S. Benjamin an Assyrian, who had been a teacher of Syriac language and liturgy in India in 1929-1933, wrote to me from America that if there was a Nobel prize of the Church of the East, it should be given to me for my second book. As for the first book he did not feel it that way. He was frank in recording his objection to the first book stating that his objection was not to the book itself but to the late Mar Thoma Darmo whose life history it unfolds.

Two leading Malayalam dailies, *Mathrubhoomi* and *Malayala Manorama* wrote reviews of appreciation on both books together. In *Manorama* it was Prof. Titus Varghese who wrote the words of appreciation. Mr A. P. Nambiyar from Trichur reviewed the books in *Mathrubhoomi*. He appreciated both the books although he remarked that the Malayalam translation of the second book made by Fr. M. P. Francis was "Padre Malayalam." How true it is that Christians use several words in Malayalam without realising that it is Greek Latin (I must add Syriac) to the non-Christians!

Roman Catholics also encouraged my literary endeavours. Monsignor Dr. Thomas Moothedan, retired Principal of St. Thomas College, Trichur reviewed the above two books in *Sathydeepam* a widely circulated Malayalam weekly which has the blessings of Cardinal Joseph Parecattil. In his review written in English Dr. Moothedan stated, "here are two biographies which can be read by the Roman Catholics without any hesitation." It was an encouraging clearance for the unbiased contents of the books of a non-Catholic writer. It was, what I could claim as next to a '*Nihil Obstat*' and '*imprimature*' Some Latin words which appear at the first pages of Roman Catholic publications officially censored or endorsed.



In 1976 I wrote two English books and one Malayalam book. The two English books are entitled *The Nestorian Fathers* and *Nestorian Missions*. The readers my have already noticed the definite article missing in the second title. It has a long learning process behind that omission. When the first book appeared, one of my former teachers, who helped me to correct my errors of omission as far as English language is concerned, suggested that the definite article was not necessary. The word 'Nestorian' refers to a person i. e., Bishop Nestorius and therefore a definite article should not be removed. He argued that it is "the Lincoln Papers" and not "Lincoin Papers." Finally I made a compromise. Since I had already printed *The Nestorian Father*, the next book should appear simply *Nestorian Missions* without that *The* in the beginning. I leave it for the grammarians among my readers to debate which of these is correct. My friend avers that the second is real English while the first is American English if the language spoken in that land of affluence can be called English.

Incidentally on the point of *The*, may I disagree to quote a popular writer in the secular world who made a fortune by writing very many sexy novels which I have never read. Irving Wallace, who is described as the word machine (his readership has crossed the 280 million mark) has some superstition about the definite article "the" in the titles of his books. In an interview mentioned in *The Sunday Standard* February 11, '79 Wallace comments quite candidly:

"Sheer superstition, Dark ages, Nothing else. The first four books started with "The" by accident. Then I wrote "The Chapman Report" and it was a big international hit, and I said, hey, I better not change my

luck. Don't change the typewriter. Don't write any books without the word "The" in the title, and I've had the same typewriter I've had since I was a little kid. Costs me a fortune every year to fix it over. I just had it sent out. 60 to 80 dollars it costs to keep in tune."

Next appeared my first book in my mother tongue. I was commissioned by the Theological Literature Committee of Kerala to write a history of the Eastern Churches. I hesitated to attempt to write a book in Malayalam, being aware of my lack of literary Malayalam. Although I began to speak that language since childhood, the grammar of my mother tongue is not easy. Moreover when I joined St. Thomas College in Trichur, some of my friends advised me to study Hindi instead of Malayalam. One reason in favour of Hindi was that the syllabus was simpler. While the Hindi students had to learn only five books for prose' poetry, stories etc a student studying Malayalam had to study about 14 books or so. I preferred the short-cut! As a good excuse I declared that I should be able to speak my national language Hindi, which was then being introduced in South India by the Hindi speaking majority in North India.

In spite of my lack of competence in Malayalam I have written several articles in that language since in 1954. Still, as it was going to be a book of some academic standard, I sought the help of a young clergyman of our Church, Decon T. R. Jos, who had passed B. A. degree with Malayalam as main. He copied my 500 page manuscript (which was reduced to 196 pages during printing) and just touched here and there. I was particular that it has to be my own style. There is no merit in having somebody else's language and style appear under my name.

Thus my first book in Malayalam was published in December 1976.

In order to write the draft of this book, I spent 12 days in the library of the United Theological College Bangalore. Then several weeks were spent in Trichur as well as in trains to read and re-read the draft. Finally it was forgotten in New Delhi where I had taken it to read. Then I had to wait to get it back from New Delhi and finally the book was published. Before it was published the editorial Board suggested that the words "an Introduction" should be added to the title since it was only an introduction and not a comprehensive coverage of, the 150 million eastern Christians around the world such as the Russian Orthodox, Coptic, Ethiopain, Armenian Syrian Orthodox, Nestorian etc. The suggestion to make the title "An Introduction to the history of the Eastern Churches." was accepted by me. There was no time and patience to add more details to justify the omission of the word "Introduction" from the title. Thus at least one book was authored by me in my mother tongue which my mother also could read.

In 1977 as soon as the Doctor of Theology degree was awarded to me, the first part of the doctoral dissertation, with slight changes was published. The title of this book was "*The Chaldean Syrian Church in India.*" Compared to my previous book this book contained fewer printing errors. During the farewell meeting given to me on April 3rd, 1977, Dr. Chacko George officially released this book, printing of which was completed only that week. He spoke very kind words of appreciation. This was an encouragement for me to write more.

In 1977 I had the privilege of a trip abroad. My interest in writing made me to write small articles of the trip to be published in 'Voice of the East' magazine. I started writing as I was airborne in Bombay on April 4. Owing to the heavy schedule in April, May and June I could not write leisurely. But after my return to India there was some free time in July and August and I started writing a full length travelogue. The book 'America Revisited' contained some information which interested several people, Christians and non Christians alike. Since my books were on Church history some friends suggested that I should write something for ordinary people who have no interest in church History. This book served that purpose. Unfortunately this book had more printing errors than my other books. Since printing was done in a hurry there was no time to read the proof. Hence I learned a lesson not to print any book in such a hurry. There was a special function to release this book. A leading advocate in Trichur spoke on the occasion. He surveyed the contents of my book in an impressive manner. On my request he wrote it down so that it could be printed as a *Foreword* to that book. Although I was waiting to receive a *FOREWORD* from one of my hosts in America, this speech was printed as a *Foreword* to save time.

Five books published in 1976 and '77 were sent to Malayala Manorama, the daily news paper with the largest circulation in Malayalam. These five books were acknowledged immediately and some months later were reviewed in that paper. I have not seen an author whose five books are reviewed in one issue. There are authors who have published five books in two years. As a beginner I was happy with my record of five books in two years.

Like every ambitious young man my reaction was "why not five books in one single year?" I planned 1978 to be that year when five books of mine would be published. But it did not work. Only two books were printed in 1978

The first book of 1978 was slow in printing. It was *Council of Ephesus of 431 A. D.* Actually it was my thesis submitted to the Master of Theology degree in 1966. I had to write only a Preface and work on an Index in addition to the proof reading. The second book was *Sacraments* which is a part of my Doctoral dissertation. So in the case of these two books I did not have to do much writing. The third book planned in that series is the remaining part of the dissertation entitled *Nestorian Theology*.

One book I actually wrote from beginning to the end in 1978 is *From Relief to Development: A Profile of CASA*. It is the history of the Church's Auxillary for Social Action from its inception in Sept. 1947 immediately after the partition of India. It kept me busy for three months. Although I was thinking of taking the responsibility of getting it printed in Trichur, I changed my mind and told the Director of *CASA* in Delhi to print it in Delhi itself. My idea was to concentrate on writing some other books instead of spending time on proof reading.

Another book I planned to publish was, *18 Million Indian Christians*. Some writing was done, but I could not proceed faster owing to the lack of a good Christian library near Trichur. It was however completed with a new title *Indian Christian Directory*, to be published by C. L. S., Madras in 1981.

A bibliography on the Nestorian Church was one of my plans for a long time. An article listing most of the books I read on this Church was published in a Souvenir in 1964. I tried to add to that list hoping to publish a book of about two hundred pages on the book on our Church.

In August 1978 I spent a couple of weeks completing a catalogue of Syrian manuscripts in Trichur to be published as an article in a *Festschrift* to Fr. Placid Podipara of Rome. Combining all these I hope that the *Bibliography on the Nestorian Church* will be published in 1981.

Since, the name of Mar Aprem was given to me I have an ambition to publish a book on that Syrian saint and scholar who died in 373 A. D. More study about his writings is inevitable before I write a book on him. There is a short sketch of his life in my book, *The Nestorian Fathers*.

In addition to books, I write articles every month for *Voice of East* in both English and Malayalam. To write for other national and international journals too is my ambition. I am not an accomplished writer. Still I have decided to work hard to write as much as I can in both English and Malayalam languages. I have begun to read more and more in order to improve the quality of my writing.

Some good friends advised me not to write ordinary or mediocre books, but publish only erudite works. Emphasis on quality instead of quantity is ideal. Nevertheless, I am not fully persuaded that I should wait for a *magnum opus* to be ready before I venture to be a published author. Only by writing, a writer becomes a

writer of repute. One thing I am convinced that the books should have good editing and proper proof reading. When an author becomes known he gets a famous publisher who has the expertise to edit the manuscript and read the proofs. Beginner writer needs such help more than a reputable author. But who cares for the beginner? He has to enter the publishing world with mistakes and imperfections and willingness to receive plenty of criticism. After mistakes and failures, an author becomes a successful one. I will never be an award winning successful writer. Still I had the audacity to write an autobiography at an early age to add to the list of books.

My books do not have a large circulation. Although the first two books had a thousand copies in the *first* edition I decided to print only 500 copies of the later books. Good publishers who know to boost up the sales technique may be able to print more copies. But Mar Narsai Press, the Church press under my control, does not advertise the book except announcing them in English edition of the *Voice of East* which only has 200 copies circulation. Still it is encouraging to get orders for my books from the U. S. A., Canada, Australia, England, Sweden, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Syria etc.

None of my books had a second edition. *Mar Abimalek Timotheus* had a Malayalam edition in Trichur and an Assyrian edition in Chicago in 1978. When permission was sought to translate that book to Assyrian by Deacon G. S. Benjamin of Chicago I gladly granted his request without any claim for royalty which he was willing to give. My idea was to make the fruits of my research available to people of different languages. All the books I wrote so far in English was done without any remunerat-

ion. For the Malayalam book however, I was paid an honorarium of Rs. 500 by the Theological Literature Committee of Kerala as they do in the case of every book they commission to write. Writing is financially profitable to some. But in my case I did not get back what I paid as tuition to Christian Writer's Institute to learn to write.

One way to make money by writing is to make one's writing sensational. Recently I read an autobiography of a poetess from Kerala. That book was a best seller when it was published five years ago. It has plenty of sensuous revelations to satisfy the emotions of the young and the old. Crime and sex sell. They earn money.

Articles in periodicals are usually paid for in the West. But in India one cannot expect remuneration for articles unless the writer is famous and the periodical is prosperous. When I received Rs. 75 from *Malayala Manorama* daily newspaper for my article on Christmas in Dec. 1977 I was more than delighted, not because it was the first time I got paid for writing an article. In the case of that article I should be happy even without that Rs. 75 because the daily newspaper with three hundred thousand copies had an estimated readership of two million Malayalees in India and abroad. When I was studying in America I used to read regularly *Malayala Manorama* although it reached there after three months sea mail.

This chapter has revealed my aspirations as a writer. My interest in religion as well as in Church history require my interest in writing. Moreover my involvement in total development of the oppressed, demands my pen to move faster than before. The readers may ask what has the man of



religion to do with journalism? Let him pray and preach. The answer to that question is found in the statement of the late Pope John Paul I, who some years ago told an interviewer "If I had'nt been a bishop, I would have wanted to be a journalist." Commenting on this reported statement 'TIME' magazine dated September 11, 1978 remarked "Throughout his life time the new Pope has been a man of words, written and spoken, in sermons and interviews, in dozens of articles and several books- The samples below reveal a man with profound conservative instincts but a light touch and a sense of humour. They also show that despite a parochial career John Paul I has wide cultural interests." I only wish that more bishops were better speakers and writers and had a light touch and a sense of humour. If so, sunday sermons and addresses in Church assemblies and ecumenical conferences would be less dry.

Among bishops in India (They are nearly two hundred) Cardinal Gracias of Bombay who passed away soon after the late Pope was elected in August 1978, was a man of words, written and spoken. He had a good sense of humour. I remember the occasion when Cardinal Gracias was presiding over the reception meeting following the consecration of Bishop Sebastian Mankuzhikiry in Ernakulam in January 1971. Since about 80 bishops and Archbishops from Cape Comorin to Kashmir and from Bombay to Assam were present, there was no place to find seats for all the dignitaries. Cardinal Parecattil asked his secretary to announce over the microphone to request the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church and the Chaldean Archbishop to be seated on the platform which we did. Cardinal Gracias immediately went to the

microphone and announced that the parents of the new Bishop (Dr. Sebastian Mankuzhikiry) should also come to take the seats on the stage. Then he said the story of a Bishop who went to his mother after his consecration and showed off his big episcopal ring. The old mother showed him an old worn out ring and said; "Son, you will not wear that ring if your father had not put this nuptial ring on my finger."

Among the bishops who are alive I know Bishop M. M. John, retired C. S. I bishop in Kottayam, as a good story teller. After his retirement I suggested that either the Bishop, or his wife who had the misfortune of listening to the same story dozens of times in various places, should publish a book of stories. Although telling a story is easy writing it down without losing the sense of humour is an art. So he did not attempt it.

None of the bishops can beat Philipose Mar Chrysostom; one of the two Suffragan Metropolitans of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Not only is he a narrator of stories but also his appropriate comments on certain occasions can ease the tension of the situation. He changes the details of the stories according to his whims and fancies depending on the audience. His sense of humour is inimitable. I say it is inimitable because I have tried to imitate his style but not succeeded. Travelling and talking are his forte. Hence he does not do much writing. Therefore I did not suggest to him to write a book of jokes. Moreover, to speak the truth, I have a secret ambition to steal his stories and jokes and write a book entitled *Decent Jokes*.

In 1979 *Nestorian Theology* was printed by Maf Narsai Press. *From Relief to Development : A Profile of CASA* was published in Delhi. The publisher put the

price of that book was Rs. 65 which is the combined cost of my first ten books. The publisher thinks that the book should not be cheap; I do not agree with him.

Last year two books were printed. The first was a reprint American edition of my book published in Trichur entitled *Nestorian Missions*. The ORBIS Books, Maryknoll, New York, a Roman Catholic publishing house, specialising in the reprints of the third world books, did a good job. Although the print area is the same, as it is a photo copy, the pages were double the size, with wide margins on all the four sides. Another book published somewhat the same time was *Christhiya Bhakti Ganangal*; 100 Christian devotional songs where my past record is practically nil and dull. But I feel amply rewarded when I hear some of my songs set to music by experts and sung by talented singers and broadcast over the All India Radio.

In 1981, two books in addition to this autobiography are nearing completion. One is *Teach Yourself Aramaic* and the other is *Julian Calendar and Nestorian Lectionary*. The work entrusted to me by the Theological Literature Committee of Kerala to write the *History of the Indian Church* in Malayalam language is likely to be completed this year.

While writing Malayalam devotional songs I wandered into the domain of English poetry. My friends tell me that my poems are as bad as my singing. Still they have not succeeded to stop my urge to write. One day I may attempt to publish a selection of English poems.

## TRIP TO THAILAND

My trip to Thailand was a pleasant one. We left Calcutta on June 16 and returned on Saturday the 28th. Thai Airlines did not have a flight to Calcutta on Fridays. That gave us one extra day after the busy conference to get acquainted with some delegates.

800 persons spent time in prayer, fellowship, study and writing. We all stayed in Royal Cliff Beach Hotel at Pattaya. Most of us worked harder than usual. And some worked day and night. Since consultations had to produce papers, everybody was involved in its preparation. During the intervals I translated the Theme Song, "How shall They hear", and a Thai Song sung during the evening when the Thai Christians staged a play "A Prodigal Daughter"

It was my first experience to attend an international conference. One delegate who was my college mate in Princeton in 1968 greeted me. In the last 12 years we both had put on some weight. The opportunity to meet leaders of various missionary organizations was a pleasant occasion. Time was short to get acquainted with

fellow delegates except in mini-consultations where we met in smaller groups for five or six times.

Several people had heard about great Nestorian missions of the early centuries. But they had thought that our Church had disappeared. Hence it was a surprise for some of them to meet me, a representative from that missionary tradition. A professor of Church History from Sumatra asked me to furnish some information about our Church in that land. He told me that if we could produce some documents from Syriac writings about that Church it would be a great contribution. The friend from Sri Lanka told me that his diocese (Karunagala) had the Nestorian Cross on its emblem. It has been there in his village from 400 A. D. Yes, the history of our Church is sleeping somewhere. And some of us are still sleeping. Will we not wake up to continue the work of our forefathers ?

Leighen Ford, the Chairman of the Consultation, gave inspiring leadership. Dr. Saphir Athyal a fellow Indian was the programme Chairman, who, with his jokes and erudition, made meetings interesting. Some leaders from various countries sang. Dr. Sam Kamalesan, sang not only in English but also in Tamil, a south Indian language. Christians from over 88 countries spent time in prayer and fellowship. Sunday was set apart for prayer and some fast on that day.

Thailand means Free land. They are free from foreign dominations. It was known as Siam. Its population is 46 million. 94% are traditional Buddhists. Christians are only less than one percent. Confucianism is followed by 1.3% and Islam by 4%. The representative of the king of Thailand came to the meeting. He was given a royal

welcome and a Bible. His statement that he had already read the Bible fully, should be a challenge to all of us.

Billy Graham was expected to give the concluding message at this consultation. But he was busy preparing for a nationwide crusade in Japan. Hence it was decided that he need not make a long trip to Thailand just for one speech. Similarly another leader Luis Palau could not come to deliver his speech owing to the sickness of his wife. In spite of these the whole consultation was inspiring. Some felt that if leaders like Billy Graham and Luis Palau were present, it would have been more inspiring. A brother from a European country spoke for only seven minutes. But his testimony was inspiring and challenging. Brothers from African countries also spoke.

Due to my interest in Christian songs I asked my Greek friend Angelos Damaskino to teach me a song. He taught me one of his own compositions:

O Isous Christos iene O edios,  
Opos ke tote tora etsi ke tora,  
O Isous Christos iene O edios  
tote tora panta ke pantu  
halleluia halleluia haleluia  
halleluia halleluia halleluia

I translated it into Malayalam. I taught him a Malayalam song, which, I am sure, he is singing in Greece now. I got one from a Punjabi and another Boro language from Assam. Then I caught hold of a preacher from Japan who had preached in Maramon Convention in India, Rev. Andrew Furuyama. He taught me the first line, but could not remember the second line. Hence promised to send it to me later.

There were five fine friends from Greece. They felt something in common with me. Nestorius spoke and

wrote in Greek. He was bishop of Constantinople. In the Gospel of Christ we are one. There is no Greek nor Indian. They had an impression that those who wear long robes do not show interest in evangelization. They are for rituals and Church administration. It is true that I give part of my time for the above duties, but woe unto me if I preach not the gospel of Christ. They have invited me to preach in Greece. In 1962 as a young deacon I stood at Acropolis near Athens where St. Paul preached.

Interest in evangelization to Muslims was evinced. It was told that more Christians become Muslims today than Muslims become Christians. During the supplementary Rev. Michael Nazir Ali from Pakistan reminded the well informed audience that the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy had a dialogue with Kaliph Al Mahdi in Bagdad in the 8th Century and he expressed his pleasure in recognizing the presence of a Metropolitan of that ancient tradition. It made me to decide to study more on the subject of the dialogue between Patriarch Timothy and Kaliph al Mahdi, since I have a manuscript in Syriac of this dialogue that took place about 1200 years ago. It is encouraging to know that Samuel Zwemer Institute has been founded in California honouring the name of a great missionary to the Moslem world. It was this great missionary who wrote the Foreword to John Stewart's book Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: A Church On Fire. May Christ's command be fulfilled through various attempts for evangelization in many parts of the world.

Most of us returned from the Consultation in Thailand to do our bit for the evangelization of the world in our own generation. Along with St. Paul, we, too asked "How Shall They Hear" singing the Theme song beginning with those words.

## GERMANY REVISITED

Syriacum Symposium held at Goslar on September 7 to 11 gave me an opportunity to visit West Germany again. In June 1977 I had spent about eighteen days in Furth, Nurnberg, Munich, Wurzburg, Paderborn, Dusseldorf and Cologne. This time I visited Goslar, Duisburg, Arenalshorst near Osnabruck, Berlin, Regensburg and Furth. In addition to this I was able to go to Amsterdam in Holland for two days.

Syriac scholars from all over the world were there. It came into being in 1972, as a professional fellowship of professors and research scholars to report about the discovery of new manuscripts and some significant findings in the study of Syriac language. This is to help the exchange of ideas and also to save this ancient language from extinction. It was indeed a pleasant surprise to me to learn that this language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ is being taught in several European universities.

Papers were read in German, French and English. Although I had passed an examination in French and in



German at Princeton, U. S. A about 12 years ago I had forgotten many words and I had difficulty in following the lectures in these two languages. But I could not complain. Because any orientalist is expected to have some proficiency in these two languages. Even a priest from my own state of Kerala Fr. Jacob Thekeparambil read his paper in German. I was not the only one to read in English. Dr. Sebastian Brock from Oxford, Dr. J. F. Coakly from Lancaster, Fr. Vander Ploeg from Holland, Dr. Mevey from Princeton, Fr. Hamby from India, Dr. Ebied from Australia and some others read their papers in English.

I read about 82 Syriac manuscripts of Trichur and I showed them the manuscript of the canon law of Mar Abdisho written in 1291 A. D. (1602 Greek year) It was interesting to many. The oldest known copy of that book which is found in Vatican is dated 1322 A.D. or so. This manuscript was earlier than the earliest! Dr. Kavfeld of Munich who is editing a critical edition of the canon law of Mar Abdisho took a micro film of this book of about 400 pages. When I mentioned about a manuscript which contains a discourse on the anti Christ Dr. Jost Blum of Louvain wanted me to supply him with a microfilm of the text if it is written by Jacob of Sarug. Many scholars were interested to know about the manuscripts. It was a challenge to me too to study the contents of these manuscripts in a detailed manner. These valuable books are kept in Metropolitan's Palace where I reside. And it is a pity if I do not study them and pass on this information to others.

Goslar where this Symposium was held is a Medieval town of importance. In the Palace there, many emperors

of fame were born. It is mainly known as a mining area where gold is also available. "Tourism and mining are the main sources of income of the people of Goslar," explained the guide who spoke three languages. He emphasised the historic importance of the town. The Rathouse (city corporation house) has a museum where gold plated chalices and beautiful paintings are preserved. The guide there could speak only German. And an Indian priest interpreted it into French.

On 11th September, the Syriac Symposium ended. Some of us departed. But more scholars arrived and commenced the Arabic, as both are Semitic languages. From Goslar I went to Duisburg. Then I visited the office of *Kindernorthilfe* which helps about 40000 children all over the world. The main work of this organization is in South India.

My next halt was at Arenshorst, about 20 minutes drive from Osnabruck railway station. Pastor Karl Heina Kuhlman has been in touch with me for the past four years. We have a lot of things in common. He has a good volley ball team under him. He has organized a choir too. Recently he was in America with his choir and he accompanied his volley ball team to South Africa. After becoming bishop two things I did in Trichur was to organize Chaldean Syrian Church choir and to start volley ball games in the compound of the Metropolitan's Palace. So I was amused to see the comparison between us. But the contrast is that I am at one end of the scale in both singing and playing, while he is at the other end. I do not specify which end, the high or the low, my readers must have guessed!

When this pastor gets some free time from volley ball coaching and choir training he writes his doctorate dissertation on the Christology of Nestorius! He plans to earn his Ph. D. from the university from where one can earn a doctorate by postal study and some written exams and dissertation. When the pastor's wife complained that she does not understand why a pastor should spend his time on studies for doctorate I told her that I wrote my doctoral dissertation after became a bishop. My topic also was on the Christology of Nestorius. Of course Nestorius himself began to develop his Christology only after he became bishop of Constantinople in 428 A. D.

On Sunday September 14th I attended Lutheran service at Arenshorst Church. I was given the first seat reserved for the committee. I was impressed by the behaviour of the young people in the Church. When the service was about to start, the pastor entered the altar from vestry. The young people who were singing stood up and continued to sing. They participated in the service with utmost veneration. It was a great privilege for me to speak during the service conveying the greetings from India to the Parish at Arenshorst. After the service I shook hands with each and every one present there. I was sorry that I could not speak their language. In a way it was good that they could go home without much delay. Otherwise I would have bored them with a lot of subjects which may not be interesting to my hearers. Anyhow a smile was enough to show good will. Organ music was excellent. Pipe organs costing a hundred thousand DM are found in many Churches. At the Church in Osnabruck I saw a pipe organ costing a million DM. Another interesting fact I observed was the lady sexton. Neither in

India nor in my travels abroad have I ever met a lady employed as sexton in the Church. My prayer group roared with laughter when I told them that I met a lady sexton in Arenshorst Church. I told my people I have no objection in appointing ladies as priests or bishops. (Yesterday I read that a lady has been elected as a Bishop in the United Methodist Church in America)

From Arenshort I proceeded to Berlin. My train passed through East German territory to Berlin. The police came to the train and issued transit visas after checking our passports. The train reached exactly at 8.45 p. m. at Berlin railway station. Three Assyrian friends were waiting for me at the platform. We greeted each other. I was taken into Assriyan Cultural Club. Jacobites, and Nestorians (let me say Orthodox Church and Church of the East) were there. I chatted with them and showed my manuscripts written in 1291 AD. They were happy when I told them that in India there are 18 million Christians, of whom  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million are Syrian Christians. Out of which about half are Catholics belonging to Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara rites. I told them that various Christian groups in India cooperate and meet on many common platforms and are personal friends.

The next night also we met at the same place and continued the conversations. During the day I visited two families of our Church and said prayers in our ancient language spoken by our Lord. They were happy because there is no priest of our Church in Germany. Last year they tried to bring one Assyrian priest from Beirut who had already reached Greece and applied for German visa. But that priest Rev. Said de Qash Patros Al Khouri (I was his guest in Beirut in 1962 when we both were deacons) did not

succeed. I am told that a German visa for a priest will be possible only if there are 100 families. In Berlin there are only 3 or 4 members. Wiesbaden near Frankfurt has about 80 families. The Jacobite Assyrians have a priest in Berlin and they have a bishop in Holland and another in Sweden.

Mrs. Gabriele Yonan had visited me in Trichur in September 1972. It was indeed a matter of great pleasure to be her guest in Berlin. She is a German who married an Assyrian from Khabour in Syria formerly from Hakkari mountains, in Turkey. Her husband Shleemon teaches mathematics, etc. in Berlin. Their son Dhaved had to go to Syria to be baptised. Gabriele wrote a book in German about Assyrians today. She can speak Assyrian language, the dialect spoken in Khabour. Although we did not correspond during the last seven years or so, she saw my biography of my predecessor Mar Thoma Darmo when she visited Khabour. While doing research in British museum she came across the articles I wrote in 1961 and 1962 about Assyrian Mission in the *Voice of the East* published from Trichur. She has made photocopies of my articles and I was happy to see them in her study room in Berlin.

At Berlin I saw the Berlin Wall which separates East and West Berlin. I saw the tombs of the people who were machine gunned while trying to escape from East Berlin. The Statbibliothek (State Library) is the most modern library I have seen. When you press a button the catalogue automatically moves and stops at the letter of the alphabet you want. There is plenty of space in the reading rooms, cafeteria etc. The hotel I stayed in also

was convenient. I spent only one night. The room rent is DM 115 which is more than my salary for one month! In addition to the usual comforts there is also a mini bar in every room. We can help ourselves, of course with extra cost. In my case they could not make any money from the mini bar.

From Berlin I went to Amsterdam, leaving at midnight in a train coming from Moscow. I had to get down at Uthrecht and travel for half an hour in another train to Amsterdam. At the Railway station I was met by Fr. J. C. J. Sanders, a Catholic priest, who is a professor of Arabic and Syriac in the Amsterdam University. He took me to his university and showed me books in the Oriental department. Especially of interest to me were three manuscripts taken by the Dutch when they were ruling Malabar in the 17th century. All these manuscripts are in Syriac. One is a New Testament. The order of books is slightly different from that of the present bible. The description in their catalogue states that the manuscript is in Estrangelo script. They were willing to change it as Nestorian script, when I told them that it is not Estrangelo.

At Amsterdam I enjoyed a boat ride through the streets of the city. One wonders how I can have a boat ride through the streets! Yes they have canals in the city. The city is in effect a cluster of 200 islands connected by bridges. The houses are on either side when we travel by boat. The next day it was more exciting, when Fr. Sanders took me in his own boat and gave me the steering and climbed down to his cabin. Since I did not know driving I was a bit scared at the beginning; but after steering the boat for half an hour I began to enjoy it. Ofcourse I did not

know how to stop the engine. Fr. Sanders had to come and do it. Since Holland is below the sea level they pumped the water into the canals they have made. So houses and gardens and even roads are about 2 or 3 feet below the water level in the canals. Cars go about 2 feet lower level than the boats!

The Ibrahim family is from Bagdad and they are members of our ancient Church of the East. But there are no priests or Church in Holland for our Church. It was a Pleasure for them to hear me praying in their language. All though I could read or recite the prayers well in the ancient lanuauge I could not speak with them in their modern Assyrian language. My stay in Holland was too short. In two days I could see Amsterdam and Heemstede. I also wanted to visit Leiden where several books of interest to our Church are printed. There is The Hague and some other places of international interest.

From Amsterdam I went to Regensburg changing the train at Cologne. At the Eastern Churches Institute, Deacon Jos Vengassery of our Church is studying. He is completing his one year German language studies and will be commencing his studies in the Old Testament prophets soon. It appears that he will be able to complete his studies in 1984. Msgr. Rauch, the head of the Eastern Churches Institute was away in Greece. It was through his kindness that a scholarship of the Eastern Churches committee of the German Catholic Bishop Conference was granted to our church for the first time. Clergy from several Eastern Churches including the Orthodox Syrian Church and Jacobite Syrian Church are studying in Germany. We visited the Regensburg university, started some ten years ago. It is a very modern institution with all facilities. Library is very modern. The catalogue in micro card system is used.

From Regensburg I started to Frankfurt airport. On the way I stopped at Furth to meet Rev. Dr. Ulrich Meyer and his family. In 1977 I had stayed in that home for ten days. In three hours we talked about a lot of things including the United Theological College where we studied in 1965. P. C. Mathew another Bangalore friend who was my host in Munich in 1977 came there with some of his friends to meet me. Yes, it was a busy time. I had to get back to Furth railway station and continue my train journey for another 3 hours. From Frankfurt, railway station I took the train to Frankfurt airport. Using the stairs and the lift I reached the Air India counter. It was 19th September, the day my visa was to expire.

On route we stopped at Rome for about an hour. As we were walking through the corridors of the airport just to while away our time, I was surprised to meet my neighbour in Trichur who was flying from India to Lagos. They too were on transit as we met--myself returning from Germany to India and they going from India to Africa. I was reminded of the saying that all roads lead to Rome--at least pass through Rome!

It was a pleasant surprise at Bombay airport to discover that the Cochin counter was waiting for passengers. And there is no queue. Until recently one had to stand in the long queue of waiting list passengers and then to return disappointed. It had happened to me at least four times. After the introduction of Boeing flights, in that route each flight could take about 120 passengers instead of 44 passengers they used to take in Avro flights. Now under the changed circumstances, there were no agents bargaining for 300 or 400 rupees to get a passenger to



fill their capacity of Boeing plane! The lady at the counter asked me whether there were more passengers in the Air India flight to go to Cochin. I told her that there were some but were still in the Customs and they did not want to fight in the long queue as usual. But those who came from abroad did not know that things at the Cochin Counter had turned upside down. Now Indian Airlines can either revert one of its two flights to Avro. But I am told by a pilot that operational cost of a 44 seater plane is 130%. So definitely they will loose if they go back to 44 seater plane. So it is better to run the 120 seater Boeings although some seats will remain vacant. After my foreign trip in 1977 I begged at the Counter in Bombay to get a place in the Cochin plane. Now the Counter has to welcome me with gratitude to fill one of their many vacant seats. What a change!

## CONCLUSION

As I look back to the past 40 years and especially to the 26 years since I joined as a part time student of the Seminary, both joys and sorrows, victories and failures, tensions and triumphs are all inter-woven. This book reveals some of those negative and positive aspects. Much emphasis has been given to the lighter side of the events. It is necessary to keep the sense of humour in this field-not only to entertain others at conversation and at public speeches but also to be of sane mind. Special care has been taken not to give undue importance to the less significant aspects of my life.

In a position of leadership, nobody can satisfy everybody. Still care was taken not to antagonise people unnecessarily. Compromise, not for any selfish ends or any religious principles but for the larger interests of our Church and society has been made. Yet it was not an easy task. The words I speak, and the actions I take have been misunderstood or misinterpreted, innocently or deliberately, on several occasions.

Well wishers have advised that leadership means to lead the people and not to please or pacify them. The same people have grumbled when the decision I made, did not favour them. Last year, at a clergy council meeting I agreed to be guided by the majority decision of the clergy council on the special issue of ringing the bell during the Church service. But they did not vote, and stated that they would abide by my decision. When I gave my decision to continue the *statues quo*, many did not like it. When I questioned one priest why he did not agree to my suggestion to vote, he said that he thought I would decide in his favour.

It is a guided democracy that is practised in the Church. Head of the Church is supreme in many ways. But it is not easy for a Metropolitan to be dictator. There is enough conscientisation in most Christian Churches to see to the people's wish in many matters. The elected trustees and representatives manage the temporal affairs, while the Metropolitan is mainly concentrating on spiritual matters. But I had to worry about financial matters too. Soon after my taking charge of the Indian Church, the Munsiff Court gave directions to the Court Receivers of our Church not to pay any salary to the clergy. I could have very well sat quiet stating that the Trustees will see to the financial matter. As the head of the Church I felt it my responsibility to pay the clergy and began to send my driver to most of the rich people and collect monthly contributions ranging from Rs. 1 to Rs. 50. There have been sad experiences during this noble effort. Some grumbled and later gave contributions thinking that it was for me. In fact not a penny was for me, it was for the clergy.

There have been court cases and money was needed. Church had no funds for running the Civil suits. One of the trustees was spending money from his own pocket.

I realised this difficulty and I offered my fullest co-operation. Gradually that trustee was freed from the financial burden he was carrying on behalf of the Church.

To co-operate with every good cause is my motto. In Church I tried to observe this policy. At the same time I did not demand complete control. There are leaders who insist on complete control and credit for the activities of all who co-operate. Some even withdraw their co-operation once they realise that they do not have complete command of the situation. My policy has been to co-operate to the maximum. Of course I had to use my discretion not to be unnecessarily involved in matters not worthy of a bishop.

I believe that much of the success or failure depends on our trust in God who has called us to the position of responsibility. I had not proved any leadership qualities when I was elected bishop because most of my years had been spent in theological seminaries in India and abroad. Still the clergy of my Church elected me to become a bishop. Therefore all these years I depended on God even at times of deep disappointments.

Some people are not active in Church matters. They have no time to spare from their work they do to earn their livelihood. On the other hand some want to be in the limelight. They pretend to be able to control the affairs. They leave the impression that they are very close to me. I have tried to be equal in my dealings with all. It is not easy to follow any such hard and fast rule.

My policy has been to be available to my flock. The good shepherd knows his flock. It is not easy to know all

my members personally. At least my desire is to be available to all my flock. Since my predecessor was a foreigner the people did not have easy access to him. Hence I made a conscious effort to improve relationship.

With the clergy I felt that the salary they received was poor. They were getting Rs. 140 per month when I took charge in 1968. At present they get Rs. 430. I also receive the same salary they receive. I made a drastic cut in my salary as soon as I took charge in order to suffer with my clergy. I believe one should get enough to eat and to maintain his family, if he has one. At the same time the element of sacrifice should be there. To me there are facilities of car, telephone, furnished house etc. I have a better advantage than most of our clergy who have house but no car or telephone.

Some of the things such as car etc are not luxuries but necessities for the kind of work we do and the meetings we have to attend. If I depend on the usually delayed trains or buses, it will not be possible to be in various towns on the same day and to get back to the headquarters. In 1969 I could not reach Trichur on a Sunday for a wedding, as there was no convenient train on the Saturday afternoon when my conference was to be concluded. My congregation advised me not to travel by bus, as it was below the status and dignity. As a result I was able to reach upto Ernakulam only and I performed Sunday service there. When I reached Trichur the rich people had decided to buy me a car. So the delay was a blessing in disguise. On the festival day one of my well wishers suggested to me to make an appeal to all the Church members to contribute to the "car fund". I asked how I can ask the poor people to provide me with a car when they

themselves do not have such conveniences. Only those people who own cars will contribute. So without any appeal from me the car owners took initiative to contribute Rs. 1000 or Rs. 2000 each and finally they presented me with the key of the new car which I use now. Thus the car owners were free from the fear that I would telephone to them enquiring of the availability of their car whenever I had a programme. They feel that it is also below my status to travel by taxi.

Not only taxis, but also buses have been frequented by me these days. Although I avoided buses in earlier years not to hurt the pride of my people now I use them for long distance travel. My reply to those who complain against it is that buses are bigger vehicles than cars. They are more expensive than my car. Why not I travel by that? Sometimes passengers appreciate my willingness to identify myself with them but on the other hand some passengers think that such "gimmicks" are signs of my immaturity.

People see me in buses in Trichur and in autorickshaws in Cochin airport and they see me in the plane. It is strange but true. If the organization inviting me to Delhi pays Rs. 2600 for my air ticket from Cochin to Delhi and return, they are willing to pay for my petrol too. Then why do I try to save Rs. 100 for them by travelling by bus and Rikshaw or by second class train to Cochin? My answer is that I do not save time travelling first class; I cannot reach airport faster by that. It can only waste money and maintain our false pride. By flying I save time, which is my justification to avail myself of the privileges enjoyed by other members of the same committee. Most of the organizations cannot afford to pay air fare or first

class train fare. The Church History Association of India has been paying only 2nd class. National Council to Churches (N.C.C.) also passed a resolution to the effect that the members of the executive will be paid only 2nd class. Considering the cost of travel I feel that I should travel cheap, wherever possible.

It is strange but true that some people think that I cannot afford even bus fare. When I was about to pay my bus fare of Rs. 3 once, one of my parishioners insisted that he would pay for me. When I buy something, some people charge more since I am a bishop. Some others do not charge at all, since as a bishop, they think, rather they know, I have not much material wealth. It is strange but true that when I check out from a Delhi hotel after signing for the airconditioned accomodation the room boy expects a fat tip, because I am a big bishop, but does he know that I do not get as much money as he gets from tips? Once the hotel boy who grabbed my suitcase from me waited for his tip. As I did not have change with me I tried to look like an ignorant man. He smiled and I smiled. He said "thankyou" in advance for the tip he hought he was about to receive. I repeated his "thank you." Finally I had to tell him that I am poorer than he! It is strange but true.

Simple life style is desirable for Christians. The Churches unfortunately after its patronisation by Emperor Constantine concentrated in the construction of huge Cathedrals. Some people think that the strength of the Church is measured by the huge Cathedrals or by the number of institutions such as Colleges and hospitals they build. Such efforts are not being condemned. Some institutions have admirably fulfilled a felt need in particular areas. May be small is beautiful. It is easily manageable. With lack of dedicated leadership many big institutions are suffering.

In India where Gandhiji is still considered a Mahatma or great Soul by most of the people, simplicity has its value. I have been accused by some of too simple. When we live by the contributions of people including the poor we have responsibility not to indulge in luxury. If I were to build a house for my residence my conscience would never permit me to build such a big building as the one in which I live. But the leaders of the Church in 1927-8 felt that the Metropolitan's Palace of our Church should not be smaller than the other buildings in our town. At present, what with black money or so several million-rupee houses have come up in Trichur. I believe what we need in India is not million rupee residences for a single family but simple enough houses so that scarcity of cement can be avoided. Church buildings, I believe, should never add to their tall towers. It should be a place where the poor too can feel comfortable. Waste and luxury are not symbols of religious prestige.

My food is simple. Following a tradition prevalent in our Church as well as in the Orthodox and Jacobite Churches in India, I gave up meat while becoming a bishop. Since September 1968 I have observed this practice at great inconvenience especially while travelling abroad. When a hostess has prepared an expensive dinner with chicken, beef etc. she will be disappointed by the guest who eats no meat.

We are allowed to eat fish. The Bible says Jesus ate fish. But about chicken, beef etc nothing is mentioned. Some think that as a Jew he must have eaten passover lamb. We abstain from fish, egg, milk, butter etc. during the 50 days before Christmas and during the 3 day fast of Ninavites.



Eating less does not reduce one's weight. Once upon a time my desire was to put on some weight. But now with cholesterol and overweight I wish to reduce some weight. With much fasting and abstinence the weight is slowly coming down from 182 lbs to 172. It may take more hunger and physical exercise to reduce to 165 lbs, which was my weight at the time of becoming a bishop. Considering my age (40) and height (5 ft 6 inches) the ideal weight is not more than 150 lbs. But no medicine can make that magic of cutting me down to proper size.

The early fathers of our Church who prescribed periods of fasting as well as prostrations during the Holy services must have indeed helped us to keep out of cholesterol. The physical exercise one gets after conducting a liturgy is indeed very useful to keep one physically fit.

Challenges and prospects are many. There is a lot more than one can do. The spiritual needs ought to be taught to some people who labour only for their material welfare. Poverty is a big problem that needs our attention. We cannot tell people about heaven and ask them to suffer now. We should do what we can do to help to eradicate poverty in our society. Many social evils such as drinking corruption, bribe, black money etc need our crusading against. Being a small minority what can we do to improve the affairs of the suffering millions?

Continuous study is required. The knowledge I have acquired is becoming outdated. In my work there is a danger of not getting enough opportunity to read and study further. Most of the bishops and pastors in India do not have much opportunity to read beyond what we did in the Seminaries. Everybody admits it has to be improved. I make an effort to do so. With increase of knowledge I pray to be

more humble. If education does not make us humble, our advanced training is not worth it.

Writing, preaching, administration and social service are some of my concerns in the years ahead. Some people may choose some at the expense of the other. However, I would like to do justice in all these four areas.

Priorities ought to be set. Periodically the priorities may shift. With challenges facing us, with the time and talents at my disposal, with co-operation from the co-workers, the priorities are likely to shift. In writing I may write poetry in addition to prose. Having written 100 songs my attention has been to learn to play harmonium so that I can tune my own songs. In addition to writing on serious subjects I intend to publish a collection of decent jokes. It is true of other areas too.

It is strange but true that some persons praise my good qualities. At the same time others may describe me in words which are not printable without fear of a defamation suit. Some have said that they would consider me the most acceptable man if I defect to their side. The same person will write all abuses and publish bit notices without mentioning the identity of the printing Press. Character assassination has been a favourite pastime in many Church disputes. In a sister denomination where litigation has been resorted to, one priest described the bishops of the opposite group as Left Reverends instead of Right Reverends and Least Reverends instead of Most Reverends. This is strange to come from the mouth of a Christian who is supposed to love even his enemies. Still it is true. If I write a second volume to this autobiography after 25 years or so will I be able to title it *,Not So Strange!*



Taken in 1940 when the author was about 6 months old.



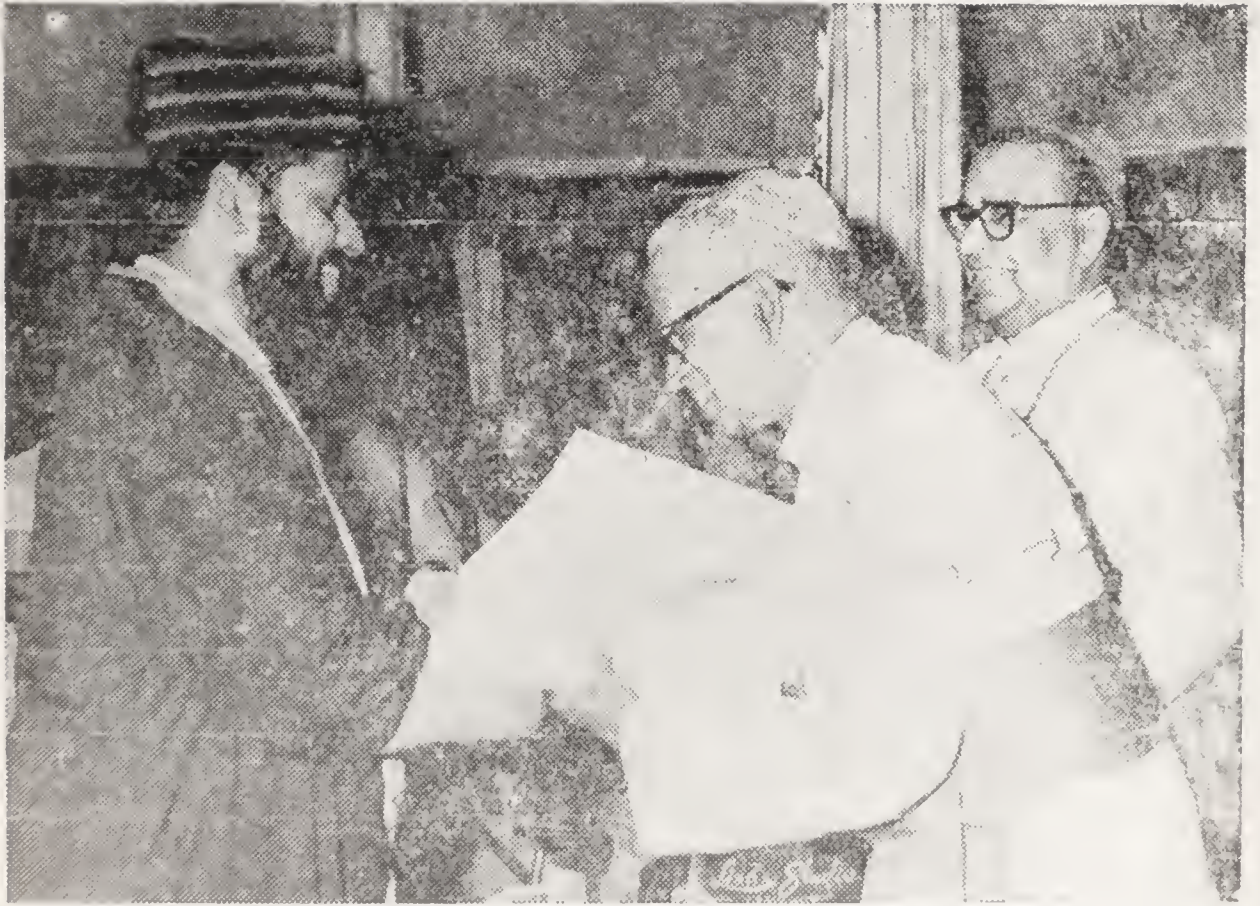
Reading the oath at the Big Church during the ordination to the priesthood on 13 June 1965.



The Golden Jubilee of St. Thomas College in 1969. Left to right: Mar Aprem, Mr. E. M. S. Namboodiripad (Chief Minister of Kerala). Mr. Panampilly Govinda Menon, Union Law Minister, Bishop George Alappat and Chevalier Joseph Petta.



In 1968 December at Guest House, Ernakulam with Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India.

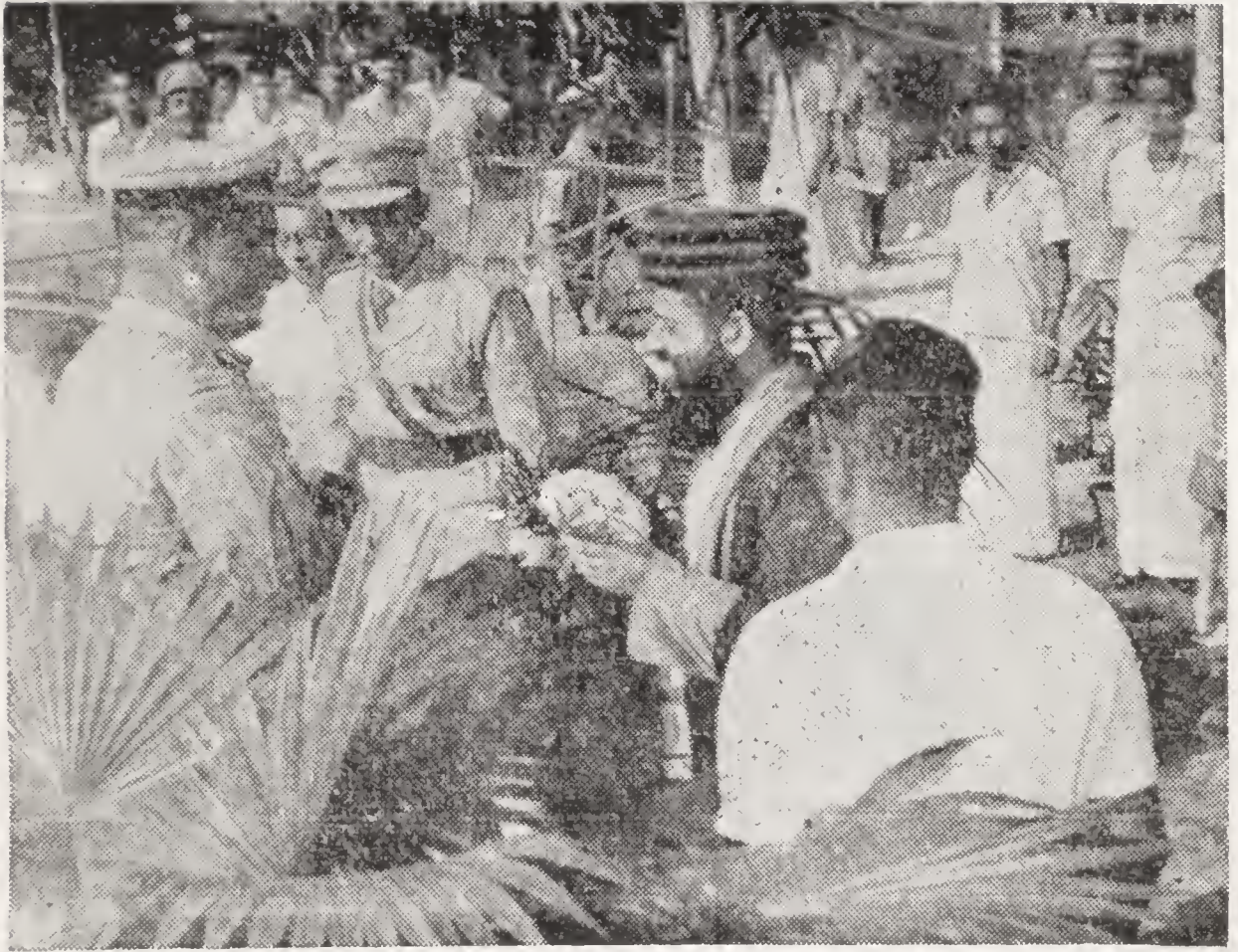


Congratulating Cardinal Parecattil at the civic reception in Trichur. Bishop Alappat looks on.



Laying the foundation stone of the Amala Cancer Hospital in Trichur. Home Minister of Kerala, President of India, Governor of Kerala.





Inspector General of Police Kerala welcoming Mar Aprem for the Passing Out Parade of the police trainees in Trichur.



Distributing rice to the poor in Trichur.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The most Rev. Dr. Mar Aprem (formerly George Mookan) was born in Trichur, Kerala, India in June 1940. Educated in India, England and America, he specialised in the field of Church History. He is now the President of the Church History Association of India.

He holds two master's degrees in Church history one from the United Theological College, Bangalore M. Th., of Serampore, 1966, and the other from the Union Theological Seminary, New York (S. T. M. degree, 1967). He was a candidate for Doctor of Theology (Th. D.) degree, at Princeton Theological Seminary, USA when he was made bishop at Bagdad, Iraq in 1968. Later he earned his D. Th. degree from Serampore University near Calcutta.

Ordained a deacon on June 25, 1961 he became a priest on the day he completed twenty five years of age on 13 June 1965, He was consecrated bishop on September 21, 1968 by Mar Thomo Darmo and promoted as a Metropolitan eight days later at Bagdad.

Since 1968 he is the head of the Church of the East in India with his headquarters in Trichur. He is active in several religious and social organizations, all over India.

**Strange But True** is an honest and humorous autobiography written by the youngest archbishop in India. Though the youngest archbishop in India, he already has more than a decade of experience in this capacity and a dozen books to his credit. The book reveals many interesting episodes in the life of a religious leader. He helps the reader to have a glimpse into the trials and triumphs of a religious dignitary. His comments on his five trips abroad are informative and interesting. He smiles at others and laughs at himself; nothing escapes his notice. The author who usually writes on religious themes has now switched over to subjects of general interest intended for a common reader. His style suits his subject matter.

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